

Young Klondike

STORIES OF A GOLD SEEKER.

Issued Semi-Monthly—By Subscription \$1.25 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York Post Office, by Frank Tousey.

No. 14.

NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 14, 1898.

Price 5 Cents.

YOUNG KLONDIKE'S TRUMP CARD;

OR

THE RUSH TO ROCKY RIVER.

BY AUTHOR OF 'YOUNG KLONDIKE.'



"Hooray! We've made a big strike!" shouted the Unknown, kicking one of several old bags which stood under the table. The bag burst immediately and a shower of golden nuggets came out on the floor. "Right you are!" said Young Klondike. "We've struck John's gold."

YOUNG KLONDIKE.

➤ Stories of a Gold Seeker. ◀

Issued Semi-Monthly—By Subscription \$1.25 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York, N. Y., Post Office, March 15, 1898. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1898, in the office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C., by Frank Tousey, 29 West 26th Street, New York.

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YOUNG KLONDIKE'S TRUMP CARD; OR, THE RUSH TO ROCKY RIVER.

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CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERY OF A MUMMY.

"I'm tired of sitting around doing nothing, Dick. No use talking, we've got to make some sort of a move."

It was Ned Golden, better known among the gold mines of the Upper Yukon as Young Klondike, who made this remark.

Ned was seated in the reading-room of the Victoria Hotel at Dawson City, with his chum and business partner, Dick Luckey.

Breakfast was over and the boys went into the reading-room to look over the latest papers in from the States.

Dick laughed at the earnestness with which his partner spoke.

"Upon my word, Ned, you are the hardest fellow to keep quiet the world ever saw, I do believe," he said. "Here we are only a week in town, and I had an idea you would stay quiet for a little while, but no, you are ready to start off gold hunting again, right away."

"That's what. The gold fever is a bad disease to get on you, old man."

"Do you think so?"

"Don't you?"

"Well, I don't know! Guess there are lots here who would like to get it the way we have had it."

"Well, I guess yes! We started out from New York a couple of poor clerks, and now we reckon our capital by millions. But why not take it easy a few weeks, instead of pegging away at this prospecting business all the time?"

"Why? Because I've got the gold fever as I told you, and I can't sit still."

"Oh, well, if that's the case," said Dick, resignedly,

"I suppose I shall have to go with you. Where's the next move to be?"

Now as the two boys sat facing the window of the reading-room, they could see the big mountain which lies across the Yukon, opposite Dawson City, rising before them.

Ned pointed to it, and said:

"There you are, Dick. Right at our doors here is an unknown region. Who ever prospect over there?"

"That's right."

"Did you ever hear of anyone?"

"Never. I've heard lots of folks say that it was as much as one's life was worth to climb it, though."

"Of course; that's just the sort of place we want, ain't it? What we are looking for is a place where no one ever goes, and here it lies right at our doors."

Just as the conversation reached this point a very pretty girl entered the reading-room.

The boys greeted her pleasantly, and Ned rose and drew up a chair.

This was Miss Edith Welton, also a partner in the firm of Golden & Luckey.

Edith was a San Francisco girl, whose acquaintance the boys had made on their voyage to Juneau.

On that occasion the steamer on which Edith took passage foundered and Ned Golden saved her life, rescuing her from the steamer just before it sank.

Edith expected to meet her father at Dawson City, but not finding him, cast her lot with Ned and Dick, and had since shared all their adventures and their profits. Probably she was the richest woman in the whole Klondike country. At least that was what everybody said.

"What's in the wind now, Young Klondike?" she asked. "I can see by your face that you are plotting

mischievous. Is it your intention to go prospecting again?"

"That's just what we are thinking of, Edith," replied Ned. "If we go, of course we want you to go with us. What do you say?"

"But how can we go without the Unknown? You know he's gone up El Dorado Creek."

"I don't know anything of the sort," replied Dick. "I know he ain't in Dawson, but as to where he is it would be hard to say."

"Probably looking for his man," laughed Ned.

"Exactly," added Edith. "That mysterious man whom he will never find."

Then all three laughed, for they were discussing a comical character. Just who and what he was will develop later on.

"Where do you propose to go?" asked Edith.

Again Ned pointed toward the mountain.

"Over there?"

"Yes."

"Why, nobody ever goes over there."

"Exactly why I'm going."

"Do you mean to climb the mountain? They say it can't be done."

"We'll see about that. Where there's a will there's a way. I think it can be done."

"All right; I'm sure I have no objection. We may as well tackle the mountain as anything else."

"Then it's settled," said Ned. "Let's start right off now. We'll astonish the natives if we happen to strike a good diggings right at the door of Dawson City, so to speak."

"When shall we start?" asked Edith.

"What do you say to three o'clock?"

"That means you intend to stay on the mountain all night."

"It would be foolish to try it any other way."

"I suppose it would. Three o'clock will do all right. I'll be on hand."

Soon after that Edith went out to call on friends, and the boys went down to the levee to hire a boat in which to cross the Yukon.

It was really remarkable to note the profound respect with which they were greeted by almost everyone they met.

So much for what money will do.

Young Klondike and his partner were by long odds the richest men in Dawson City.

Every word they uttered on the subject of mining was listened to and discussed on all sides.

Every move they made was noted, and it was for this reason that the boys boarded the boat then and there, and pulled down the river to a little wooded cove about a mile below town. Here they left the boat hidden among the bushes and walked back to Dawson.

"I don't propose to have everybody watching us when we go over," said Ned. "First we know we'll have a dozen boats after us. That's just exactly what I don't want and won't have."

So at three o'clock Young Klondike and his part-

ners quietly took a wagon which came to the hotel for them, and drove away out of town.

The wagon carried provisions, a tent, rifles and such other things as were likely to be of use on their exploring expedition, and when they reached the cove these were put on board the boat.

"Now, don't you tell a soul where you took us, or what you saw," said Ned, to French Peter, the man who had driven them out. "There's a ten dollar note for you if you hold your tongue when we get back."

Of course there was no other way in which Young Klondike could have been sure of the fellow's silence; but money will purchase silence in Dawson City as elsewhere, and although many pressed French Peter when he returned to town, no one succeeded in getting any information out of him about Young Klondike's movements. No one guessed that the boat seen crossing the river late that afternoon carried the young gold king and his friends.

Nothing more desolate than the bank of the Yukon under the big mountain can be imagined.

The boys made their landing, and drew the boat up among the bushes.

Enormous ledges of rock frowned above them. To attempt to ascend the mountain here would be to attempt the impossible.

Ned surveyed them carefully, but could see no break.

"We'll never get up there," he said. "That's a sure thing. Where shall we strike in first?"

"We've got to find a place where we can climb up; that's the first move," Edith remarked.

"Decidedly; but how are we going to do it? Which way shall we go?"

"Down the river," said Dick.

"Right you are! A lucky man, and always a lucky leader," laughed Ned. "I just wanted to hear you express your opinion, that's all."

"Perhaps it won't prove as lucky as you think," said Dick. "A fellow can't always hope to hit it right."

"That's so! Why did you say down?"

"Because if we go up it will bring us opposite the levee, and the first thing you know someone will catch onto us with a glass. If we are to keep our movements secret that won't help us a bit."

"Besides, we know the ledges run up opposite Dawson," said Edith. "I guess it's our best hold to go down. Load me up with all I can carry, boys, and we'll start."

Young Klondike and his friends were used to carrying heavy loads on these expeditions—"packing," it is called.

They had traveled many hundred miles on foot thus loaded down, and there was no one in all the Klondike country who could pack a bigger load than Ned Golden; on this occasion they walked off with all their belongings as easily as if they had carried no load at all.

Half a mile brought them to a place where there was a break in the mighty rock wall which skirted the foot of the mountain.

It was not much of a break either; and to the unpracticed eye it would have seemed impossible to climb the mountain there.

But Young Klondike saw it differently. He stopped and surveyed the ledge and then declared that it could be done.

"What do you think, Edith?" he asked. "Can you get up?"

"I'm sure I can," replied Edith. "Wherever you go I'm willing to try to go, Ned."

"We'll take the rope," said Dick; "that will make it easier and safer at all events."

Dick tied the rope around his waist and Ned and Edith did the same.

Experienced mountain climbers know that it is safest to be thus lashed together, although Ned would have greatly preferred going up on his own account, but the rope gave security to Edith and that was the main thing after all.

It was a terrible pull up those rocks. Dick would get hold of a tree and draw himself up, and Ned would work up after him, and then holding on by one hand, turn and help pull Edith up.

Meanwhile Dick would crawl on to the next tree, sometimes actually on his hands and knees, and so they went on for fully five hundred feet, and the ledge where the thick pine trees grew always in their eye, seemed to recede as they advanced, and be as far away as ever.

Coming at last upon a little shelf of rock where there was just room enough for three of them to stand, they turned to look back down the way they had come.

It almost made Young Klondike's brain reel to look down from that giddy height.

The whole valley of the Yukon for miles and miles lay spread out before them like a map.

Dawson City lay at their feet, the houses flattened by the height and the people as small as ants as they walked on the levee and through the streets.

"By Jove, we can never get back!" gasped Ned. "We could no more go down over this ledge without breaking our neck than we could fly."

"And there don't seem to be any end to the climb," said Dick, looking up. "The higher we go the further off the top seems to be; the fact is, it begins to look as if we were stuck."

"Don't you say it, and don't you think it," replied Ned. "Push on boldly. We've got to get to the top or bust."

Dick tried it again, and little by little they worked themselves up to another stopping place, where on looking up still further they could see that one more effort would bring them to the top.

"Hooray! We're almost there!" cried Ned. "Get your breath, Edith, and we'll make the last pull."

"It's safe to say that no one ever climbed up here before," declared Dick, and he was going on to say more, when all at once he stopped and pointed up to the top of the last ledge.

"Look! Look!" he exclaimed. "A man!"

It was immensely startling. Ned was ready to declare that the man had not been there a minute before.

"Is it a man?" breathed Edith. "Gracious! It looks to me more like a mummy!"

All stood motionless, staring at the strange object.

It was standing against a tree, a tall, dried-up specimen of humanity. The face was a deep brown, and the features horribly drawn and dried up. There seemed to be no eyes—only the empty holes where the eyes had once been. Thrown around the body in such fashion that their true shape could scarcely be determined, were some old rags of clothing.

Altogether it was a hideous, repulsive-looking object, which stood there above the heads of Young Klondike and his friends.

"A mummy, sure," said Dick. "Edith is right!"

"But how did it come there?" asked Ned. "I'm positive that it was not there when we first came out on this ledge."

He took out a fine field glass which he always carried and turned it on the ledge.

Seen through the powerful lenses the full details of the figure stood out hideously before Ned's eyes.

"A mummy as sure as fate!" he cried. "Well, upon my soul, this is strange."

Dick had a look through the glass and was just passing it to Edith, when a curious cry which seemed to come from behind them lower down the ledge attracted their attention.

All turned involuntarily to look, but there was nothing to be seen.

"What was that?" exclaimed Edith.

"Where's the mummy?" cried Dick, in the same breath.

Here was a mystery—a mystery of a mummy.

For the strange object on the top of the ledge had disappeared.

CHAPTER II.

THE LONE HUT ON THE GLACIER.

"THAT beats the band!" said Dick. "Can it have been a live man after all?"

"Never!" said Ned. "Whatever the explanation of the mystery may be, that ain't it. That thing was a mummy, sure."

Now it must be remembered that Young Klondike and his friends were not entirely unacquainted with mummies; any one living long in Alaska could hardly be.

The Indians throughout this region have a great habit of embalming their dead.

Often the dead bodies of great men thus preserved are kept for months and months in their huts, preserved in a sitting posture, with all their goods and personal belongings displayed around them.

The boys and Edith had seen many such, and

were well acquainted with their peculiar appearance. Ned could not doubt that they had seen a mummy up there on top of the rocks; but where was the thing now?

"Of course the way to find out is to climb up there and see," declared Ned, after the discussion about the mummy had gone on for some moments. "Looks to me as if we had neighbors here, after all—that's the way I figure it out."

"We'll soon know," said Dick. "This last pull will be easy enough. Come on. Edith, you might, just as a matter of precaution, unship your rifle and have it ready, but I don't believe we are going to need it, though."

The ascent was soon accomplished. As Young Klondike and his friends came out on top of the ledge a general exclamation of amazement escaped them, and no wonder, for the sight which met their gaze was not only beautiful but grand.

Instead of the rounded dome-like appearance which the mountain top presented seen from Dawson City, here at their feet lay a broad, deep valley filled with a glacier, the myriad of ice points glittering like so many diamonds in the light of the descending sun.

Beyond the glacier the mountain rose again to a considerable height, and Young Klondike perceived that it was this they could see from the streets of Dawson.

Seen there it looked like a straight rise from the river, but seen here they knew that to reach the real top of the mountain would involve a journey of many miles.

"This is a great go," cried Dick. "No chance of finding gold here."

"Not much as matters stand," answered Edith, "but remember, Dick, we haven't seen all the mountains yet."

"But the mummy, the mummy," said Dick. "Where in thunder is the mummy? There's hardly room to swing a cat here on this ridge, and I'll be hanged if there's room enough for any one to play tricks on us? Where is his mummyship? That's what I want to know?"

"Hold on!" cried Ned. "There's a house down there on the glacier."

"I see it," said Edith, leaning over the ledge. "A log hut in close to the rocks!"

It stood almost at their feet, and as they looked down on the roof, they saw that it was old and decayed. Great tufts of Arctic moss were growing on the boards, and the logs, which formed the sides of the hut, were moss-grown, too.

"That hut ain't been inhabited in many a long day," said Ned, as he turned his glass upon it. "Now, I wonder who could have been mad enough to have built it down there on the glacier in a place that it's as much as a man's life is worth to get to. By gracious, it beats me!"

"We want to get down and have a look at it," said Dick.

"Yes, if you please, but how are we going to do it. Only a fly could walk down that wall."

"I don't believe any respectable fly would attempt such a thing," said Edith. "I'm sure he'd break his neck if he did, but, of course, there must be some other way of getting down to the hut."

"Some way, certainly; let's look for it," replied Ned, and they wandered along the ridge toward Dawson a good half mile, but the wall leading down to the glacier remained just as steep.

Pausing for a few moments to rest and have a look at the city below them, they were about to move on when all at once Dick burst out into a hearty laugh.

"What's the matter now?" asked Ned.

"Why, don't you see?" Dick replied.

"No; I don't see anything to laugh at."

"Look down there."

"Down where?"

"In Dawson."

"Whereabouts in Dawson?"

"In front of the new Mining Exchange."

"Hello! I didn't see all that before. See them, Edith? This is serious. I don't like it, not for a little bit."

Out came Young Klondike's glass again.

He turned it down on Dawson City.

What he saw was a great crowd of people gathered in front of the Exchange.

All were looking up at the mountain.

Not a few had glasses and were looking through them.

"Well upon my word, they are right on to us!" cried Edith, who could see the people well enough.

But Ned could do more than that. He could study their faces and was able to recognize many of his friends on the Mining Exchange.

"Of course they see us," he said. "This is altogether too bad. I don't like it at all. Next thing you know there'll be the greatest old rush over here that Dawson City ever saw."

Now this fear of Young Klondike's was not at all imaginary.

Golden & Luckey were in some respects the most popular characters in Dawson City, and in all respects the best known.

Of course their movements were always watched and now that the people had discovered them upon the mountain there was pretty sure to be a rush up there if they did not take steps to prevent it. The fact was that the luck of this lucky firm had become a proverb, and whatever they did was sure to attract attention, as they had good reason to know.

"Let's get right out of the way," said Ned; "perhaps they don't recognize our faces, and if that is the case we don't want to give them the chance."

"That's what," replied Dick, "and, hello! Here's a way down on to the glacier now!"

Dick had taken a few steps ahead as he spoke, rounding a point of rock which cut across the ridge. There was a break in the ridge here, and an abrupt rise to a higher level on the other side.

Down between the two masses of ragged rocks a stream ran, falling some twenty feet to a lower level where a second stream joined it.

These united fell down upon a broad shelf of perhaps a quarter of a mile in width, extending on through the valley for a long distance.

Across this level land the little river ran and passed out upon the glacier where it had worn itself a deep channel in the ice and went sweeping on toward the second mountain, its clear water sparkling in the sun.

"What a beautiful sight!" cried Edith. "Really, it's charming."

"We must have a picture of that," declared Ned.

He got out his camera, and focusing the view from its most pleasing aspect, took a snap shot.

"Name it, Edith," he said. "I don't believe many people have ever seen this river. I should say nobody had if it wasn't for the hut. Give it a name."

"I'll christen it Rocky river, then," replied Edith. "It begins among rocks and runs across the ice to rocks, so that ought to be a good name."

"Couldn't be a better! Rocky river it is from this time on, and I'll make it my business to see that it gets on the map."

Now this was something Young Klondike was able to promise, for at that very time a new map of the Klondike was being prepared in Dawson, and Ned was one of the committee who was supervising the work.

"Nothing to hinder us from getting down on the glacier here, is there?" asked Dick.

"Nothing at all. It's all plain sailing. We can climb down over these rocks as easy as rolling off a log," replied Ned.

Then they tried it.

The descent was not quite as easy as Ned anticipated, but they managed to climb down.

Once on the ice they found it decidedly colder. The hut lay back about a quarter of a mile, and they started toward it, leaping over great breaks in the glacier—crevices—they are termed, rounding hummocks, which would be difficult climbing, and at length reached it without a fall.

And their way followed the windings of Rocky river, which here, right by the hut, was joined by another and smaller stream, which issued from the rocky wall of the ridge.

This stream swept over the level shelf here about five hundred yards wide. It had cut a deep channel for itself through the gravel, just as Rocky river had done through the ice, and Ned saw at a glance that it was a splendid chance for gold, if, indeed, there was any gold on the mountain at all.

"Someone has been at work here," he exclaimed.

"That's what," said Dick. "That's why the hut was built, of course."

"Certainly. Wonder who it could have been?"

"Give it up."

"Whoever it was it must have been years and years ago," said Edith. "You can see for yourself that the hut has been built a long time."

"No doubt it has been here for many, many moons," said Ned, "but you must remember that there has been more or less gold washing done in the Yukon Valley ever since it was discovered. There is nothing strange in this hut being found up here."

They had now reached the hut and the next thing was to explore it.

The interior was as old and dilapidated as the exterior, but one thing instantly attracted the attention of all. There had been a fire recently built on the hearth.

"Someone's here now!" exclaimed Edith.

"Or has been within a very short time," said Ned. "Hello! That bunk was occupied last night."

There were two bunks, one on each side of the hut.

There was a pair of new blankets in the left hand bunk, and the impression of a man's form on the old straw mattress.

"Say, we ought to know those blankets!" cried Dick.

"Ought to know them! Why, they are mine!" Ned exclaimed.

"Hello! Hello, Young Klondike! Hello the hut!" a voice was heard to shout outside, and then it called again:

"I'm a-coning! By the Jumping Jeremiah, I've got my man!"

CHAPTER III.

WORKING THE MUMMY'S CLAIM.

"THE Unknown!" exclaimed Young Klondike, and they all hurried out of the hut.

Coming toward them over the glacier from the direction of the rocky ridge was a short, thick-set man, wearing an old plug hat tilted on the back of his head, and big cavalry boots which came up above his knees.

He was dragging after him what had once certainly been a man, if it could no longer be called so—in short the mummy!

He had him by the hair, and as the dried-up thing was as stiff as a ramrod, it looked rather odd to see the little man dragging it after him over the ice.

"I've got my man, boys! I've got him at last!" he cried. "What in the world brought you up here? Ye gods and little fishes! I did think I was to be allowed to do a little exploring on my own account."

And here we must pause to introduce the last member of the firm of Golden & Luckey. It was the famous Unknown.

"Unknown," because the man, strange as it may seem, had always declined to tell his name, even to his partners.

By profession he was a detective; his claim, was that he was hunting a mysterious criminal, that he had been hunting him all over the world for years.

Perhaps this was the Unknown's little joke, although he always preferred to be serious about it.

Sometimes he carried it to lengths unpleasant for strangers, for it was an old trick of the detective's to suddenly pounce upon some unfortunate individual, declaring that at last he had got his man and threatening to arrest him, but only to apologize a moment later and profess great regret at having made a mistake.

Young Klondike, Dick and Edith broke into a hearty laugh at the comical sight.

"Say, Zed," called the former, "your man seems to be rather a back number. You'll have a sweet job putting the handcuffs on him. So you're the fellow who played the trick on us up there on the ridge?"

"I'm the identical individual," replied the detective. "Whoa, January! Stand up, there, you snoozer! Now look at his royal nibs, Edith! Ain't he a handsome looking specimen? Who'd ever thought of seeing you up here? What do you mean by prowling on my claim?"

Now this was all a joke, and as the Unknown talked he jerked the mummy about in a comical way which brought out a general laugh.

"I saw you coming up the mountain," he cried, "and I thought I'd give you a scare with this thing. Ha! Ha! Ha! How you did stare when I pulled my man back. Oh, I've been watching you. I wondered if you were bright enough to get down here to the hut, but I see you were."

"Well, I guess! I'd be ashamed if we couldn't," said Ned. "But tell us what brought you here? We want to know right now."

"Tell me what brought you here? I'm the first comer on this land; the claim is mine."

This good-natured banter might have gone on indefinitely, but Ned broke it up by telling how he had suddenly formed the plan of prospecting the mountain and had lost no time in carrying it out.

"Now that's just like you, Young Klondike," laughed the detective. "You're always on the rush." "And ain't you?"

"Well, rather. I've had an idea of exploring this mountain for the last two months, but didn't do it. There seemed to be a little spare time just now, so I thought I'd strike in and see what sort of a place this was up here."

"And you found the hut and the mummy lying in one of the bunks?"

"No, I didn't! Now, there you are jumping at conclusions again, Young Klondike. I found the mummy in a little cave away up the rocks there—almost to the top of the ridge, in fact."

"Hello! Then there's a way up on the ridge besides the one we found?" Ned asked.

"Of course there is," replied the detective. "When I saw you fellows looking over and trying to find it, I was on the point of hollering out to you, but you backed away, and so I didn't do it. Thought I'd let you work it out for yourself."

"And where were you all this time?" asked Dick.

"Where was I? Why, in the cave to be sure, and my man with me."

"Your man—you mean your mummy."

"Exactly. Oh, he's a great fellow, this mummy of mine, and he's going to make us all rich."

"We're all rich now, but I don't mind being richer," laughed Ned. "You've found something—I see it in your eyes."

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, I just have, then," replied the detective with a chuckle. "Look here, boys, when I found this mummy lying in the cave his clothes were to all appearance as good as the day he lay down in them to die, but when I undertook to lift him up they all dropped to pieces and among other things that dropped out of his pockets was this:

"What is it?" asked Ned, as the detective began fumbling in his own pocket.

"Look at it!"

"A paper?"

"A bit of bearskin."

"So! Pretty well tanned, then. Hello! There's writing on it."

"Yes, and that's my discovery," declared the Unknown, as he passed the curiously written document over to Ned.

"This mummy is evidently all that remains of the man who wrote these words," he said. "Perhaps he was a trapper. Mebbe he might have been a sailor who deserted his ship and penetrated into the country; but whoever he was, there's no doubt that he built the hut and worked a claim here; pity is that the only document we've got to tell us anything about him ain't complete."

Ned examined the bearskin carefully.

It was thoroughly tanned and made as good a piece of parchment as any one could ask for. The trouble was that the ink used, whatever it may have been, had been washed off in spots.

This made the document read rather oddly.

Leaving the mummy outside on the ice they went into the hut, and Young Klondike spread the document out on the table.

It read as follows:

"I am *** is my name *** I came here from *** have been here two years now *** gold *** richest diggings the world ever saw *** no use unless I can get away *** located in the river below the waterfall. Dig there anywhere and you will find *** I write this because I may never see my home or civilization again *** what I dug is hidden ***

Here the document abruptly ended. There was a considerable space which had evidently been written over, but the ink was entirely washed off.

Away down at the bottom of the bit of bearskin was written "January, 1834, JOHN ***."

This was all. It fixed the date of the document over half a century back and told them that the writer's first name was John.

Of the last name there was merely a trace.

"And you think that your mummy wrote this thing?" asked Ned.

"I'm very sure of it. Can you question my being right?" the detective replied.

"Well, no, I suppose not," replied Young Klondike, "but what took the body into the cave? Did John, whatever his name may be, die there? When he felt death coming on, why didn't he stay in his hut?"

"Now, come, Young Klondike, don't ask me a question like that," replied the detective. "Perhaps he went in there because it was warmer. Perhaps the Indians put him in there after he died; perhaps this, that or the other—how can I tell?"

"Can't be told by anybody now, I suppose," said Dick.

"Of course it can't," replied the detective, "but what puzzles me is how our friend John became a mummy."

"Oh, that's easy enough accounted for," said Ned.

"Easy to say so, but how?"

"Limestone rock up there in the cave, Zed?"

"Well, yes, it is."

"Well, then, water percolating through the interstices of limestone rock has often been known to transform a corpse into a mummy."

"Ha! Ha! Percolating through the interstices is good. You ought to stuff that."

"Or mummify it."

"Either will do to exhibit those big words in the museum of our Exchange, and that's what I propose to do with our friend John."

We must explain that Young Klondike was the father of the new Exchange at Dawson City.

In fact he built it, and when he built it there was a room laid aside for a museum, and on its shelves were already many curiosities gathered together from all parts of the Klondike country.

"John will look well in the museum," said Ned.

"Fine!" declared Edith. "We'll have a special glass case built for him. I'll pay the bill."

"No, you won't! John is my mummy, and I'll pay the bill," declared the detective, but let's bring him in and stand him in a corner; then we'll go out and look up this claim of his. I don't suppose you have any idea of going back to Dawson to-night?"

"Well, hardly," replied Ned. "How long have you been up here yourself?"

"Three days."

"And we thought you were up at El Dorado creek. Haven't you been looking for this claim of John's?"

"Yes, but I didn't find it."

"Thought as much. Do you expect us to do any better?"

"Why, of course, I do. Who's luckier than Dick Luckey? or more likely to strike gold than Young Klondike? Tell me that!"

Ned laughed, and they went out after John and stood him up in the corner.

The mummy was certainly a curious looking object and one for which any showman would have given a good round sum.

After some further discussion and a more careful examination of the document, the boys walked over to Rocky River.

They here discovered that the Unknown had been panning in many places, something they had not noticed before.

"You've been hard at work here," said Dick.

"You bet I have. In the river below the waterfall is what the writing says, and that's what I've been looking for—John's diggings."

"What about the gold he speaks of hiding?"

"Ah! that's a different thing. By the Jumping Jeremiah! I only wish I could find it."

"Have you searched the hut?"

"Of course."

"And the cave?"

"Sure."

"I must see that cave, but we can't go there now. What's Ned doing down there?"

Ned had pushed on below the waterfall, and was stooping and scraping up the sand and pebbles at the edge of the river with a stick.

"I believe this is the place," he called out. "There's certainly a color here."

"How can that be the place when the document expressly says it is below the waterfall?" replied the detective.

"Well, don't you see how the waterfall has worn everything away here?" replied Ned. "Look at these rocks. They are as soft as punk. Fifty years has sent the waterfall back, and this is surely the place where we ought to look."

What Ned asserted was only reasonable, and all hands turned in to pan out the sand at this place.

The Unknown had some tools with him and he now brought them out from behind a big rock.

Young Klondike's party had some, too, and the detective volunteered to go up on the ridge where they had been left and pack them down.

The Unknown was always willing that someone else should do gold washing. The icy chill of the water on his hands did not please him at all, to say nothing of picking away at the frozen ground.

Before the detective had time to make the top of the ridge, Ned had his first panful ready for washing.

Dick and Edith watched eagerly as he shook the pan, letting the water carry of the coarse gravel and sand.

If there was any gold mixed with what had been put in the pan, it ought by its superior weight sink to the bottom.

There were a few specks left in the pan when the last of the water had run out, but that was all.

"Bother! There ain't much there, is there?" Edith exclaimed.

"I should say not," said Dick. "This sort of digging won't suit us for a cent."

"You bet your life it won't," said Ned. "We've got to have something better than this."

"Hello!" shouted the Unknown from the top of the

ridge, and he added something that the roar of the waterfall drowned.

"Hit 'em again!" cried Ned. "We don't get what you say."

"There's—a—boat—coming—across—the—river!" the detective bawled.

"Let her come!" replied Ned. "You come back with the tools!"

"Any luck?" the Unknown yelled.

"Not a bit!"

"I thought so! Unless we can make John talk we ain't likely to strike any!"

Then the Unknown disappeared over the ridge.

"He's right," said Dick. "I'm afraid we ain't going to make much working the mummy's claim."

CHAPTER IV.

THE BIG STRIKE ON ROCKY RIVER.

YOUNG KLONDIKE and Dick Luckey had washed out six pans of sand by the time the Unknown got back with the tools and other belongings, which they had left on the ridge.

"Well, you don't seem to make it go at all," remarked the detective, as he threw down the pack.

"That's what I don't," replied Ned, "and yet I believe the gold is here."

"Ought to be. Whoever my friend John was, he certainly was a plain, every-day sort of fellow, and I don't believe he spent his time tanning down bear's skin just to write lies on it."

"Right," said Edith. "I don't believe it either. At the time he wrote there was gold here along the creek."

"That's what's the matter," said Ned. "I've got the secret of it, I think."

"Hello! Another brilliant idea, Young Klondike?" cried the Unknown.

"Yea, verily! I believe I've hit the true explanation of the thing."

"Spit it out."

"Why it's just this; there must have been an awful lot of dirt washed down over this ridge in the last fifty years."

"Naturally."

"While a good deal of it was swept away by the river all did not go, and it gradually formed a deposit here under the falls."

"Unquestionably the explanation," said the Unknown. "We may be washing twenty feet above the dirt John worked a half century ago."

"Then the long and short of the matter is we've got to get down to it," said Edith.

"Exactly," replied Ned, "and that's no such easy matter, either. Of course, the bed of the creek is frozen solid just below the surface and the frost probably goes down the usual depth."

"I wonder how we are going to get at it?" mused the detective. "Of course we can't build a fire in the middle of the river."

"Well, hardly. We shall have to turn the river into another channel, that's all."

"A slow and difficult job," said the detective. "Goodness knows how long it would take us to build a dam strong enough to turn the stream."

"I don't see why you have to do it!" said Edith, after a few moments' thought. "I see a way out of it all that seems easy enough."

"Name it," replied Ned. "Let's have your idea right away and if there's anything in it, you may consider it adopted in advance."

"Dig your shaft here alongside the creek and then run a tunnel in under the river below the frost line."

"Upon my word that's an original suggestion?" the Unknown exclaimed.

"For my part I'm quite ashamed not to have thought of it before," said Ned. "It's adopted. Now what comes next?"

"Next is to do it," laughed Edith.

"And the next after that to find the gold if there's any to be found there," said Dick. "I own up I'm not skeptical about it; still we may as well make a try for it and get to work."

But it was too late that day to begin any such undertaking and they determined to postpone it until the next.

So they returned to the hut and a fresh fire was lighted on the hearth, and Edith prepared a first-rate supper out of the provision which had been packed over from Dawson.

The long evening was spent in the hut.

Ned played his banjo and Edith sang and the Unknown told stories. John remained in the corner silent and grim, as well behaved as a respectable mummy ought to be.

By midnight nothing had been seen or heard of any visitors from Dawson City, so all hands wrapped themselves in their blankets and lay down to sleep.

It was pretty cold before morning there on the glacier, and the boys awoke to find the water frozen on top of the ice, but it soon melted as the day advanced.

The first thing necessary was to climb upon the side of the ridge, and cut down a number of the stunted fir trees which grew there, to build the fires with.

They tumbled the trees down on to the flat, and cut them up afterward.

It took all day to collect wood enough to begin their work, and the next was spent in the same way, for in order to get the frost out of the ground, it would be necessary to keep the fires going for a long time.

A spot was then selected, and the wood piled up and lighted early in the evening.

Our Klondikers sat around it until dark, and kept it well supplied with wood.

Then Ned banked up the hot ashes and covered them

with earth to keep the heat in, and they all retired to the hut for the night.

The following morning the ashes were cleared away and digging began.

This is the usual programme on the Klondike.

A vast deal of time and expense has to be devoted to thawing out the ground, for during the short Arctic summer the frost never wholly leaves the ground of its own accord.

Ned now marked out the line of his shaft, six feet by twelve, and with the help of Dick and the Unknown, went to work.

They found the ground soft and loamy, and digging consequently very much easier than they had expected.

Good headway was made, and by twelve o'clock the shaft had been run down six feet when they were forced to stop, having struck the frost line again.

Now another fire had to be built, and it was allowed to burn all the afternoon.

At evening Ned cleared the embers out of the hole and found the ground quite soft beneath.

"I don't believe we shall have to burn it out any more," he declared. "Water is evidently working in here below the frost line. I believe we can go straight ahead now."

The prospect was so encouraging that they determined to work straight ahead until darkness overtook them.

Ned was anxious, too, for in a case like his, water might be an enemy more to be dreaded than the frost.

If a connection with Rocky river happened to be struck, then good-by to all hopes as far as that shaft was concerned, for the water would instantly rush in and fill it, and of course the boys had no means of pumping it out.

Nothing of the kind occurred.

The wet spot proved to be nothing but an accumulation of melted frost, and was soon passed.

To Ned's great joy they now came to a soft, gravelly deposit without a trace of frost.

"No trouble now," declared the Unknown, "but we may as well haul off till morning, and then begin to drift under the river bed."

This was all well enough. Of course they could not work very well in the dark, but on the other hand time was precious, for their supply of provisions was now almost gone, indeed would have been quite exhausted but for the extra quantity the Unknown had brought along.

"If we don't strike it to-morrow one of us had better go over to Dawson and lay in a fresh lot of grub," said Dick. "Of course we ain't going to break up here till we've made our drift."

It would have been mere folly to do this, for if the theory on which they were working was the correct one, no hope of striking gold until they had penetrated in under the river bed was to be entertained.

First thing in the morning everyone was at it again.

The boys turned out at sunrise, which means between two and three o'clock, and had put in three good hours work before the Unknown showed up.

By this time they had succeeded in running the shaft down to a point where it would be safe to drift.

The Unknown came down into the hole and surveyed the work with the air of an expert.

"I should think we might go ahead now," he said.

"Just what we are going to do," replied Ned.

"We'll start in under the river right away after breakfast. If my theory is correct we ought to be working on the old bed within a couple of hours, and if there's any truth in the mummy's letter we may expect to find gold there."

They soon went to breakfast, Edith having prepared hot coffee and made up the best meal she could.

After it was over all went down to the diggings and the drifting began.

"I see a fortune in here," said Young Klondike as he struck his pick into the gravel bed. "Something tells me this is going to be the trump card."

Down came a shower of earth and pebbles. There was little or no frost here, and nothing to prevent the business of drifting from going straight ahead.

Ned did the digging and Dick loaded the bucket, which the Unknown passed up to Edith.

It was all he could do to reach up, although a ledge of earth had been left for him to stand on about half way up the shaft.

Worked in this way, progress was slow, but steady.

Still, after two hours, there was no trace of the precious metal, and Young Klondike was just beginning to despair, when all at once his pick broke through into an open space.

Ned almost tumbled through with it, and the pick slipped out of his hand and was gone.

"Hello! What you struck now?" cried the Unknown. "By the Jumping Jeremiah, it can't be a cave here under the river."

"It ain't! It's wood," replied Ned. "See, here's a bit of an old board."

"By gracious, it's a buried house!" cried Dick. "I can see the wall on the other side."

And, strange as it may seem, Dick's explanation proved to be entirely correct.

Here was a rude, log hut, buried under the bed of Rocky river.

But after all it was not so strange, for Young Klondike himself had witnessed landslides among the mountains along the Yukon, where great masses of earth and rocks came tumbling down, sufficient not only to bury a house but a town.

Edith now came down into the shaft, and Ned broke away more of the boards which proved to be the door.

"Ye gods and little fishes! I believe this is where John lived!" cried the Unknown. "Look, boys—here's his bunk and his old cook stove and his mining tools and all sorts of traps and——"

The Unknown stopped short, stared, threw up his battered plug hat, catching it on the back of his head after it struck the ceiling and came down again.

"Hooray! we've made a big strike!" he shouted, kicking one of several old bags which stood under the table.

The bag burst immediately, and a shower of golden nuggets came out on the floor.

"Right you are," said Young Klondike. "We've struck John's gold."

CHAPTER V.

THE BEGINNING OF THE GREAT RUSH.

"He's watching us, Young Klondike. His eye is right on us. By the Jumping Jeremiah, I'll give him the slip though!"

"Who says we can't make a move in Dawson City without being followed and having our movements watched day and night?" replied Ned Golden. "It seems as if it was so, and I say it's a blame shame."

Ned and the Unknown were walking down the principal business street of Dawson City one evening, about a week after the big strike.

Close at their heels followed an ugly-looking fellow, dressed in the usual style of a Dawson City tough. He had been following them ever since they left the hotel.

There was nothing particularly strange in this when you come to think of it, for all Dawson was talking about Young Klondike and the wonderful luck of Dick Luckey just about that time.

Just as Ned surmised the prospecting party had been seen on the mountain from the streets of Dawson.

The result was just what might have been expected.

A rush across the river began next day. The Unknown was not mistaken when he thought he saw the boats.

But it was one thing to go over the Yukon and quite another to climb the big mountain. The rushers did not find the way, and after numerous attempts were forced to give it up.

Next day they tried it again, and still again the next, but with precisely the same result.

Then the curiosity seekers began to think that they had been mistaken, and it was rumored that Young Klondike and his company had gone down the river to Forty Mile, and everybody began to wonder what that meant, when all at once Ned and Dick reappeared in their midst.

Immediately Dawson City was thrown into a fever of excitement again.

Golden & Luckey made a deposit in the bank of nuggets and dust amounting to over sixty thousand dollars.

Nobody knew where it came from, and nobody had seen them come into town.

When Ned came on 'Change that morning he was besieged by a thousand questions, none of which would he answer.

The result was just what might have been expected; he had been followed ever since, for now all Dawson knew that he was laying in tools and provisions for another move.

"Let him keep after us, I don't care," remarked Young Klondike, as he and the Unknown walked along. "He won't get on to anything. Wouldn't they all go wild if they only knew what we found in the hut under Rocky river?"

"Well, I guess yes," replied the Unknown. "A hundred and fifty thousand dollars ain't to be sneezed at, dear boy, and yet we've got to turn them off the scent some way or other, or by the Jumping Jeremiah, there'll be a rush as sure as fate."

"Let it come," said Ned, carelessly. "I don't care."

"It makes a big difference when a fellow can't locate his claim, though."

"Of course, we can't locate up there. You know that part of the mountains has already been located and never worked. All we can do is to jump the claim under the mining law. Let the rush come and I'll trade on it. We'll jump the whole business, and sell out subclaims subject to our jumping."

"Good idea. Oh, well, there's no use worrying; only I hate to be hounded this way, and I'm going to give that fellow a lesson before I'm through."

"I wouldn't; it will only make trouble."

"I will, though. Do you know him?"

"No, he's a stranger to me."

"I have a suspicion that he's my man."

Ned laughed, and they entered the bar-room of the Victoria Hotel where they expected to meet Dick.

As usual, in the early evening, the bar-room was crowded.

Men in red shirts and rough clothes were drinking, smoking and discussing mining matters.

Dick Luckey sat over at a table waiting for Ned to come in.

"Well, what's the good word?" Dick asked, as his partner approached the table.

Before Ned could reply there was a great scramble behind them.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, my man at last! Watch me put the handcuffs on him!" they heard the Unknown shout.

The instant the spy entered the bar-room, the little detective pounced upon him and catching him by the shoulders shook him as a dog would shake a rat.

The detective's grip was iron. He was good for any man in the bar-room, but he immediately let go his hold.

"Ye gods and little fishes! Wrong again!" he cried. "My dear sir, let me apologize. I am a detective. I mistook you for another party. Now, don't say a word. You know you've been following me

about for an hour. Honest Injun, I took you for my man and thought you wanted to give yourself up. Come and take a drink."

There was a general laugh all over the bar-room.

Nearly everybody knew the Unknown and his little peculiarities. They had seen him play this game before.

"Don't you lay your hand on me again!" growled the man. "I'd see you in blazes before I'd take a drink with you! I——"

"Don't you do it! Don't you do it!" roared the Unknown, for the fellow attempted to draw a revolver.

But the Unknown did not take it out in talking.

He whipped out his own revolver like lightning.

So did Young Klondike and so did Dick.

In a twinkling they had the man covered, and the fellow was glad to sneak away.

"He's Thad Welsh, the gambler," said Dan Lovering, an old time Yukoner. "He's been around Dawson before, but he belongs in Forty Mile. He's no good."

"They say you can't spoil a bad egg, but I'll spoil him if he bothers me any more," said the Unknown, and he sat down at the table with Dick and Ned.

No one interfered with them now, for Golden & Luckey were universally respected.

"When do we start, Dick?" Ned asked in an undertone.

"Well, everything is ready. I don't see why we shouldn't start as soon as it's dark."

"How many boats have we?"

"I've fixed up three. One is packed full of provisions—there's enough to last us a month."

"Good enough! And the other?"

"One has tools, and bed and bedding—anything we are likely to want."

"And the other is intended to carry us, I suppose?"

"Exactly!"

"You've done first rate. All that remains is to get the stuff up to Rocky river without being seen."

"Which we'll never be able to do, in my estimation," declared the Unknown. "You may figure it out how you like, the rush is bound to come."

Without disputing the Unknown's conclusions, or putting himself particularly out of the way to avoid being seen, Young Klondike nevertheless arranged his departure secretly.

Edith was up-stairs in her room, and ready to start at a moment's notice.

The move was made shortly after midnight.

Ned and Edith walked together down to the same place from which they had started before.

Dick and the Unknown had gone there separately and were awaiting their arrival.

"Did you see anything more of Thad Welsh?" asked the detective. "Were you followed at all?"

"We didn't see a soul," replied Ned, "and yet I wouldn't like to swear we were not followed."

"Ain't that a boat away over there on the other

side of the river," cried Dick, suddenly. "It looks to me like one."

"Can't make it out," replied Ned, after a long look. "It may be a boat or it may be only something floating on the water."

"Don't seem to move though."

"I think it's a boat," said Edith; "but never mind. We may as well start."

All were of the same opinion, so they got into their own boat to which the two others were attached.

Very leisurely they pulled across the Yukon.

They had scarcely covered half the distance when they saw two boats put out from Dawson.

At the same instant a shot was fired over on the other side.

"There's your boat, Edith!" cried Ned. "The fellow has been laying for us sure enough."

"Tain't Welsh," said Dick, peering forward into the darkness. "This man has got whiskers, Welsh only had a mustache."

"He's trying to head us off," said the Unknown. "Boys, I say let's take the bull by the horns."

"What do you mean?" demanded Dick.

"Let him head us off. Let him come up to us and take him along."

"Not half a bad idea," said Dick.

"Bother; we don't want him," added Ned. "He'd only be a nuisance!"

"Wait; it would postpone the rush till we got located," declared the unknown. "The whole fact of the matter is we are surrounded by spies, and they are determined to follow us. The longer we can stave off the rush the better, I say."

"Good enough. Let it be just as you want it," replied Ned, and he so turned the boats that the man who was pulling out toward them must come across their path.

"Boat ahoy! Boat ahoy!" shouted the Unknown.

"Hello, yourself!" was the answer. "Who are you? Where you bound?"

"We are three poor travelers bound nowhere," replied the detective. "Come alongside with your old ark. Did you fire that gun?"

"Well, what if I did? 'Tain't against the law to fire a gun on the Yukon, is it?" returned the man as he came alongside.

He was a short, thick-set old fellow with a bushy black beard.

Ned looked back and saw that other boats were putting out from Dawson; there was quite a little fleet of them.

They were pretty sure to be overhauled if they did not get out of the way.

"Look here, stranger, who are you?" he asked.

"Joe Dusenbury's my name," replied the man.

"I reckon you're Young Klondike. I've seen you in Dawson if I don't mistake."

"More than likely. I've been there enough. What's your business?"

"Haven't any."

"Which means you are gold hunting?"

"I've done a deuce of a lot of hunting, yes, but I don't find any gold worth talking about."

"Want a job?"

"Mebbe. What is it?"

"To help us pack these things up the mountain."

The man's little eyes glistened. They could see that even in the dark.

"Well, I don't know. What will you pay?"

"Give you a claim in our new diggings."

"These are them. What say, it's a big thing to tie to the firm of Golden & Luckey, boss."

"I see you know us well enough."

"I don't deny it."

"Is it yes or no, then? Decide quick. There are other boats coming, and I don't want those in them to see where we go."

"You'll give me a claim outright in your new diggings up on the mountain?"

"Give you a chance to work alongside of us. We don't own an' claim up there ourselves yet."

"B'gosh! I'll take that offer. I don't want anything better than to tie to Young Klondike. I'm sorry now I fired that gun."

"Pull around the point then," said Ned. "Quick now! Don't lose an instant. You want to be as spry as you can."

The man showed that he was a perfect expert at the oars, for he sent his boat flying around the point before Ned and Dick could make the turn.

He was holding back, waiting for them when they came up.

"Now which way, boss?" he called out. "Say, the boys mean to follow you to-night. They are determined on a rush wherever you go, and they'll make it, too. Better be spry in carrying out your plans, whatever they are."

"My plan now is to haul this stuff right in under the rocks and stop there till morning," replied Ned, coolly. "If you want to train with me, you want to help us do it—that's all!"

They made their landing in a hurry.

Ned knew the spot well. It was the place where they left the boat before.

Here the steep ledge overhung a foot or two and there were thick bushes growing in front of it.

Although it was some distance away from the place where they went up the mountain, there could not be a better spot to hide.

As fast as possible they carried their traps in behind the bushes, and then the boats were dragged up there, too.

"They're coming! There'll be twenty boats in front of us in less than no time!" the Unknown exclaimed, for he was watching on the shore.

"Was that your work? Did you give the signal, Dusenbury?" asked Ned.

"Well, now, that's what."

"Who hired you to spy on us?"

"Didn't nobody hire me. We're all into it; we've all been a-watching you ever since you were on the mountain before."

"We're in for it, Dick," said Ned, quietly. "We might as well try to stop the wind from blowing as to stop this rush. I tell you it can't be done."

They thought so a few minutes later, when peering out from behind the bushes they saw the boats pass.

Young Klondike counted twenty of them—and each boat was packed to its utmost capacity with men.

It was hard to see their features there in the dark, but Ned and Dick did not fail to recognize some of them.

They were some of the hardest characters in Dawson City.

"By gracious, them fellows will make a hot time for us if they ever get the chance!" cried the Unknown. "Just you wait, though. We can head them off. Instead of waiting till morning, we'll start up the mountain right now, to-night—for the rush to Rocky river has fairly begun."

CHAPTER VI.

THE LITTLE OLD MAN WHO CARRIED THE TRUNK UP THE MOUNTAIN.

IF ever the Unknown surprised Young Klondike it was when he made this remark about going up the mountain then and there.

A keen recollection of the difficulties of their last journey came over him.

Ned did not feel as though he wanted to climb the mountain that night.

"It can't be done," he said emphatically.

"It can be done," declared the Unknown with equal emphasis.

"The man who attempts it takes his life in his hand unless he happens to strike the little old man with the trunk," drawled Mr. Dusenbury.

"Of course we all want to know who the little old man with the trunk is," said Dick. "You'd better tell us, Dusenbury."

"Hold on," said the Unknown. "I've heard that story before. I can tell it myself."

"Tell it, then," said Edith.

"What's the matter with my telling it?" said Dusenbury. "It's my story, anyhow. I put it out first."

"Business, business!" cried the Unknown. "We'll tell stories later. I know a way to get up this mountain that Young Klondike don't know at all."

"Hello!" said Dick. "I suspected as much. And yet you let us come down the way we went up, at the risk of our necks."

"There was no risk. If there had been I wouldn't have let you do it; but my way is better, as you'll see if we can use it."

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Dusenbury, laughing till his sides shook.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded the

Unknown. "What are you grinning like a Cheshire cat for?"

"Never you mind, boss."

"Bah! Bother! You are all mystery. Keep your mysteries to yourself, I don't want to know them. Are you here to help us in our work or not?"

"Of course, I am. Who said I wasn't?"

"Nobody."

"There you are then. What do you want me to do?"

"To come with me and show me where your friends have landed. I want to know what they are going to do?"

"You don't go alone," said Ned. "Let's all go together. It won't pay to be separated in a case like this."

"But the goods? Are we to leave them here to be swiped by the next boatload of toughs that comes along?"

"Not a bit of danger. They'll never find them here. Anyhow I'm going and so is Dick and of course, Edith can't be left alone."

All started along the shore a few moments later.

There was a narrow beach between the rise of the mountain and the river.

This was pretty well wooded and it was easy enough to make one's way along and keep out of sight.

Rounding a point of rocks they came soon upon the boats which had been beached in a broad cove about a quarter of a mile from the spot where Young Klondike and his friends landed a few days before.

The prospectors were gathered on the shore where they had built a fire and evidently meant to put in the night.

"Hush! Don't go a step further!" breathed the Unknown. "Now's our chance to overhear their plans."

For some time they stood there among the bushes listening.

There was one big fellow named Cool Codmore, an inveterate gambler and all-around hard nut, spouting away to the others.

"I'd like to know where in thunder they went to?" he was saying. "Of course it must have been somewhere in here. Gosh blame that Young Klondike! This is the second time he's fooled me. Where did he land? We've searched everywhere and can't find him, and there ain't no use going no further. A fly couldn't crawl up the mountain at any place beyond here."

"Don't you be so sure of that. Young Klondike went up beyond here the other time."

"Tell you he didn't, Jerry Pilcher. 'Coz why? He couldn't. I know the place blamed well. All the way from here to Forty Mile this side of the river is to me like an open book."

"Maybe," replied Codmore, "and yet you know the little old man does go up the mountain at half a dozen points beyond here packing his trunk."

Now by packing it might be well enough to explain that Cool Codmore meant carrying.

Naturally our Klondikers sharpened up their ears at this.

"Hush!" breathed the Unknown. "We are going to hear the story of the little old man who packs his trunk up the mountain now."

And sure enough they were, for one of the prospectors, a tenderfoot only lately from the States, at once asked what about the little old man who packed his trunk up the mountain.

"Well, sir," replied Jerry, lighting a pipe, "it's like this, mebbe it's a ghost and mebbe it isn't. Them as believes in ghosts is blame sure he's one, and them as don't believe in ghosts, is equally dead certain he isn't, so whether he is or whether he isn't I don't know and there you are."

"Which ain't the story at all nor any part of it," said Cool Codmore. "P'raps I'd better tell it, for I see you don't know how and it's no use to try."

There was a little more sparring between them and then Cool Codmore took up the talk.

"You see, fellers," he began, "'twas always known that there was slathers of gold up on this here mountain since the first time the Yankees and Canucks began to come up here to the Klondike, but the trouble was to get at it on account of the mountain being so gosh blamed steep.

"When I first came here I tried it, and I've tried it many a time since, but I never was able to get up no distance at all, and the little old man what packs his trunk up the mountain, walks right up the side of them rocks like a fly."

"Come, come," said the tenderfoot, "you don't seem to be getting on with your story no faster than the other fellow did. Why don't you get down to business—say?"

"Don't, because I hain't ready," growled Codmore. "Anyhow, there hain't nothing much to tell, except that on stormy nights and often in the dead of winter, the little old man is seen going up the mountain here with his trunk strapped to his back. Some say he's a Rooshian, but there's others who say he's an old French fur trader, or rather was, for, of course he's a ghost."

"Shucks!" said the tenderfoot, "I don't believe in ghosts."

"Don't make any difference whether you believe in 'em or not, this here's one," declared Jerry Pilcher. "Why the little old man has been packing his trunk up the mountain these fifty years. You ask any of the old *habitants*—them's the French fur traders—and they'll tell you. Live here long enough and mebbe you'll see him yourself some day, and if you do then look out, for they say the man that sees him dies."

At this Cool Codmore broke into a great hoarse laugh.

"That's all poppycock," he declared. "I've seen him twice myself and am I dead? Well I guess not—not much."

They talked a little more about the mysterious old man and then the subject changed, and it became Young Klondike and his plans again.

The determination was to follow the fortunes of Golden & Luckey if possible, wherever they might go on the mountain, for as was well known, the mountain was open to anyone who chose to jump the claims of the original locators, who had failed to comply with the requirements of the mining act.

Ned listened as long as it was worth while to listen, and when at last he saw the prospectors settle themselves down for the night, he made a sign to the Unknown that it was time to move.

They returned to a safe distance beyond where the prospectors had left their boats, and then stopped to talk matters over themselves.

"You didn't go back on us, Dusenbury," was Ned's first remark, "and I thank you for it. You stand by us and we'll stand by you and make your fortune in the end."

"That's what I'm out for, boss. They say everybody strikes it rich what stands by Young Klondike, and I'm sure I hope I'm no exception to the rule."

"But about that story you were going to tell us," said Edith. "Have we heard it the way we know it or not?"

"Exactly the way I know it."

"And you, Zed?"

"I don't know no different except that I don't believe in ghosts."

"Of course it's all a silly legend," said Dick.

"Which it ain't," replied the Unknown, quietly.

"Hello!" cried Ned. "What now?"

"What I say. It's no silly legend. I've seen the little old man who packs his trunk up the mountain with my own eyes."

Of course, everyone was immensely interested at once.

"I want to know more about this," said Ned. "Spit it right out."

"Well, it's like this," said the Unknown. "When I came over here first I wandered along the base of the mountain for a couple of miles, but I wasn't as lucky as you, Young Klondike, for I couldn't find any place to go up."

"And yet you went up."

"Well, rather; the way I did it was to follow the little old man."

And the Unknown went on to tell how while he was wandering along the shore, he suddenly saw this mysterious personage standing on a rock above him.

It was just such a looking person as had been described by the man Codmore.

He seemed to beckon to the Unknown, and then turning disappeared behind the rock.

Having often heard the legend, the Unknown, with his usual love of adventure, determined to follow the strange figure, and to cut his story short, did follow him up on top of the first ridge by a way that was comparatively easy.

Of course, anybody else but the Unknown would

have told all this before, but the detective had his own ideas, and did just as he pleased, and in this instance it pleased him to keep his information to himself.

They walked back to where they left their goods, still discussing the matter.

"If I could have been sure of finding that place again, I'd have taken you down the way I came up," said the Unknown, "but I couldn't find it for myself, and when you came I began to feel afraid I never should get down again. What's more, I'm blest if I think I can find it now."

"We can try, and we must go right at it," said Ned. "Where's Dusenbury? Perhaps he can throw some light on the matter."

He looked around, supposing the silent old prospector to be standing close behind him.

But Dusenbury had vanished, and what was more, they couldn't find him, although they looked along the shore back among the bushes—everywhere they could think of, in fact, but all to no purpose. The man had gone!

"Come, I don't like that," said Edith.

"Looks as though he was a spy," added Dick. "He's heard all we had to say, learned all our plans, and now he goes and lights out."

It made them all feel decidedly uneasy, but they had felt that way before, for it was quite impossible to pass the prospector's camp without being seen, either by land or water, and to remain where they were until morning would be to betray their plans.

"I suppose I'd better try to find the place where I went up," said the Unknown. "I'll own up now that I don't know where it is. I tried to find it yesterday and also the day before and I couldn't. Still, I have hopes that I may be able to find it to-night."

He went on to say that it was further along the shore toward Dawson City and they started in that direction, leaving their goods behind them to be carried up later in case they found the path.

Half an hour was wasted this way and they covered about a mile of the beach, but could discover no break in the wall. Then the Unknown declared that they had certainly gone far enough and they started to return.

"Strange I can't locate that rock," mused the detective. "By the Jumping Jeremiah, I must be taking leave of my senses. You see, boys, it was—stop! look! Ye gods and little fishes! There's the little old man now!"

All turned their eyes in the direction which the Unknown pointed and saw standing high above them on a narrow ledge just such a person as has been described.

It was a stout little man with a small trunk strapped to his back.

He was looking down at them curiously.

"Hello! Hello!" shouted the Unknown.

There was no answer.

The strange figure merely raised his right hand and beckoned to them.

Then turning he suddenly vanished from their sight.

CHAPTER VII.

ANOTHER BIG STRIKE ON ROCKY RIVER.

"WHERE'S he gone?" cried Edith. "Is he coming back again?"

"You'll see him again in a minute," said the Unknown. "Come on, friends! The trouble is all over. I know the way up the mountain now."

The Unknown made a rush for a place where the bushes grew thick against the base of the ledge.

Pushing them aside he revealed a narrow trail leading up between two ledges.

From the beach this would scarcely be noticed, but it was plain enough now, and by no means steep.

The detective declared that it was the trail he had followed before.

They had scarcely discovered it when the little old man was seen above them again at a higher point still.

Once more he stood, stared and beckoned, and then, as before, disappeared.

"We'll go right on after him," said the Unknown, and that was what they did, and in less than fifteen minutes found themselves on top of the ledge, in plain sight of the hut on the glacier, but considerably below Rocky river.

Four times during the climb the little old man showed himself, but when they reached the top of the ledge he was no longer to be seen.

To account for all this mystery was quite beyond the powers of Young Klondike and his friends, and they wasted no time trying.

"We are all right now," declared the Unknown, "and let the little old man explain himself when and how he pleases. What we want is to get our goods up."

With their usual energy they went right about it.

Five trips did the business, for taken here the climb was a comparatively easy one and could be accomplished without fatigue.

By the time the sun rose all their belongings, except the boats, were on top of the ledge, and the prospectors, easily seen from the ridge, were still asleep at their camp.

Young Klondike was jubilant.

"If I could get hold of that little old man, or little old ghost or whatever he is, I'd give him the best claim on Rocky river," he declared. "We've given the rushers the slip completely. Let them get up the mountain, if they can."

After a hasty breakfast they started to convey the goods and tools down into the underground hut, and the remainder of the day was spent in getting ready to continue their work under the river.

As yet, be it remembered, they had done nothing

toward working the bed of the river which Young Klondike believed was going to turn out to be his trump card.

All that had been accomplished was to secure the gold which the dead miner left behind him, and although this in itself constituted a small fortune, it did not satisfy Young Klondike at all.

As for the rushers they dismissed them from their minds. Young Klondike knew these men well. They were the scum of Dawson City.

He felt that it was very doubtful if they would dare to attempt the difficult climb that he had successfully accomplished with Edith and Dick, and after three days no one appearing, they all came to the conclusion that Ned was right.

Each day the Unknown took a view down from the top of the ridge.

The report was always the same. The boats were gone and there was nothing to be seen of the rushers.

Busy with their work they forgot all about them.

Success crowned their efforts from the start, and we must now describe how it came about. This involves some mining points which it may be well to know.

It will be remembered that Young Klondike's theory was that the deposit of gold worked by John the mummy, while yet that dried up individual was in life, lay in the old bed of Rocky river over which a landslide from the heights above had deposited a great mass of rocks and earth.

That this landslide had actually taken place was proved by the discovery of the buried hut, and the point now to be accomplished was to run a drift out on top of the old river bed.

But Young Klondike aimed at more than this.

The richest deposits of gold never lie on top of the bed of rivers and creeks, but beneath them, usually down from ten to twenty feet.

Young Klondike's little company held a consultation, and determined to run two drifts, one on top of the old river bed, and the other beneath it about fifteen feet down.

In this way he proposed to find out exactly what this new claim was worth; whether or no it was really going to prove a trump card, and whether it would pay to work it.

He figured out that it would take about a week to do this, but as the hut was provisioned for two weeks, he felt that it would pay best to put it through on these lines.

The first thing they did was to continue the shaft down below the level of the hut to a distance of fifteen feet.

It was very easy digging and soon accomplished.

Little or no gold was found in the gravel which came out and that was discouraging, but it by no means proved that gold would not be discovered when they came to drift under the river bed.

The next move was to start the drifts.

Edith was determined to work with the others.

The plucky girl always did her share whenever it was necessary, and was as good a miner as there was on the Klondike.

With the Unknown to help her, Edith now undertook charge of the upper drift while Ned and Dick took the lower.

Their plan was to work out as much earth as possible into the shaft on each level during the morning, and spend the afternoon hoisting it up.

It was rather slow work, but by the end of the week they had pushed both drifts in about eight feet.

Occasionally they would pan out a little, always finding gold, but only a trace here and there.

On Sunday they knocked off work, and went down on the shore to see if their boats were all right, finding them undisturbed.

Nothing was seen of the rushers until just as they were about to return, when two boat loads of men were seen coming down the Yukon from the direction of Dawson City.

They did not stop to observe them closely, but hurried right back up on to the ridge, and watched them from that height.

The men landed and roamed around the shore for a while.

Ned saw Cool Codmore and Jerry Pilcher among them—saw them examine the boats, and later saw them start back to Dawson.

This was all that happened on Sunday, and early Monday morning they went right to work again.

"If we don't strike it to-day, I declare I believe I shall give it up!" Ned remarked to Dick, as he drove his pick-ax into the wall of gravel before them.

"Perhaps we haven't got low enough yet," replied Dick. "I've kind of thought so from the first, but—hello! what's all this?"

They were working by the light of a powerful reflecting lantern, and as the gravel loosened by Ned's pick came tumbling down, Dick caught the gleam of gold.

"We've struck it! We've struck it!" he cried. "Oh, Ned, look here! We don't need any panning to show that we've struck it rich!"

This was true enough.

The gravel pile which had fallen at their feet fairly glittered with golden nuggets, and where there are nuggets there is pretty apt to be dust which don't show itself except at the bottom of the pan.

Ned seized the lantern and flashed it on the gravel pile, letting the stuff run through his fingers.

The gravel bristled with nuggets, and while they were examining it there came a tremendous pounding overhead.

"Hello! Hello! Hey there, Young Klondike!" the Unknown yelled down the shaft.

"What's the row?" called Ned, running to the end of the drift.

"We've struck it!"

"Hooray! So have we!"

"You don't mean to say so! We've struck it rich!"

"And don't you forget it we have!"

"We're right in it all around, then! Young Klondike, this is your trump card!"

It was a good day for mining, that was certain.

"Come up here, Ned, and see what we've found!" Edith now called out.

"Come down here and see what we've found!" replied Ned. "I don't believe that your strike can hold a candle to mine."

"Who says so?" cried the Unknown. "Ladies should be served first every time. If you don't want to come up stay where you are. Findings are keepings, and by the Jumping Jeremiah! we'll keep all we've got."

"Oh, if there's going to be any words about it, up we come," answered Ned, seizing the rope and pulling himself up hand over hand to the upper level of the shaft.

Edith pointed triumphantly to a rough brown looking object which lay half embedded in the gravel.

"A big nugget!" cried Ned.

"That's what," said the Unknown. "That's Edith's find. Can you equal that?"

"It's the biggest I ever saw, if it turns out to be as big as it looks," declared Ned, "but it has got to be dug out before we can know."

"That's what we are here for," exclaimed the Unknown, and he seized the pick and went to work.

Ned and Dick took hold too and they soon rolled the nugget out on the gravel.

It was more than half gold, a rough, ugly-looking object, but immensely valuable.

Ned declared his belief that it could not be worth less than twenty thousand dollars.

But this was not all.

Examination showed that the old bed of Rocky river was indeed a rich mine, for a little behind the nugget—the boys worked in a few feet further—they struck a bed of small nuggets similar to that found on the level below.

The rest of the day was spent in hoisting out the precious gravel, and it is unnecessary to say that the big nugget came out with the rest.

Tuesday was devoted to panning out Monday's hoist.

The result was tremendous.

At night Ned weighed up nearly ten thousand dollars in nuggets and dust.

Wednesday was hoisting day again, and another big pile of gravel was accumulated.

On Thursday more panning was done and with equally favorable results.

Double the amount of gravel was panned, and Ned weighed up eighteen thousand dollars after it was all over.

"Nearly fifty thousand in a week!" cried the Unknown. "By the Jumping Jeremiah, that's enormous! Who says our Rocky river diggings ain't Young Klondike's trump card?"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NIGHT ALARM.

THERE was no more work done that day.

Supper was served at seven o'clock, Edith having knocked off work a little earlier to prepare it, and after it was over Ned got out his banjo and began to play, while Edith cleared up the dishes and made everything snug for the night.

The Unknown went up out of the shaft, leaving our friends in the hut. He felt nervous and restless, and declared that he was going for a walk.

"That's just like old Zed," declared Dick. "You won't see him work any more now. Once we make a strike that ends it with him always. He'll be on the move looking out for new diggings, you mark my words."

"Oh, let him have his own way," said Ned. "It don't make much difference. In fact, I feel very much the same way myself. I'd like to put a gang of men on to this claim and let them work it for us, and go off on the hunt for new diggings myself."

"I tell you what it is, Ned," said Edith, who was busy washing up the dishes. "We'd better make sure of what we've got first. I say let's get this stuff down to Dawson and give the claim a rest for a week. After that we can put in two weeks' work and round up what we can. It will add a good bit to our bank account, and then we can publish what we've done to the world, and let the rushers come in."

"And sell them claims?" asked Ned.

"Yes."

"I like that idea. Don't think we could do better. Of course we don't want to stay stuck up here on this mountain for any great length of time, and as to making this a winter camp it's not to be thought of. We'd surely starve to death if we didn't freeze."

"We could never get up and down the mountain that's certain," said Dick. "I think Edith's idea is about the correct one as usual, and for my part I'm ready to act upon the suggestion at once."

"What, you don't mean to go down to Dawson to-night, do you?" laughed Edith. "That's what I call being a little too prompt."

"No; of course I don't mean that," replied Ned, "but what we might do is to pack up to-night and move down in the morning. Of course the Unknown wouldn't object. He'll be only too glad of the rest."

After some further talk they determined to do it, and as soon as Edith was through her work, Ned undid a bale of bags which had been brought along, and they began packing up the gold.

The nugget, of course, was too heavy to handle, and it was rather a problem how to get it down the mountain whole.

"For it has got to go whole," declared Ned. "I've set my heart on landing that lump in the Mining Exchange at Dawson City, and letting all the world know we found it, for there's no use talking, it's the biggest thing ever found on the Klondike; in fact, it

is just what the Unknown likes to call our diggings here, the trump card."

They sat up talking until ten o'clock, when Edith retired to the loft and went to bed, leaving Ned and Dick to wait for the Unknown.

"I shan't sit up very long, you bet," declared Dick. "I'm about tired out, and it wouldn't surprise me a bit if the Unknown had gone to Dawson and didn't show up till morning. It didn't need him to tell me that he had one of his old restless fits on him—I could see it in his eye."

Half an hour passed and still the Unknown did not appear at the top of the rough ladder which led down to the hut.

Dick lay down and went to sleep then, but Ned remained on the watch, as it was the rule of the camp that someone should always remain awake.

Toward one o'clock Young Klondike grew so sleepy that he felt he could stand it no longer and he determined to wake Dick and take his turn, but before doing so he went up the ladder and looked off on the glacier, thinking that perhaps he might see something of the Unknown.

It was a wonderful sight to see the moon shining down on that vast field of ice.

After contemplating it for a moment Ned turned his gaze toward the top of the ridge and as he did so he was startled by hearing a strange cry ring out upon the silence of the night.

What was it?

Ned could see nothing and yet the cry had been startlingly plain. There was something wild and unearthly about it, too; it almost made Ned's blood run cold, and as he listened he heard it again.

"What in thunder is going on up there, Ned?" called Dick from the bottom of the ladder, for he had been awakened by the cry.

"Blest if I can tell you," replied Ned. "Come up and see what you can make out of it, Dick."

Dick hurried up the ladder, and while the boys stood there looking about in every direction the cry came again.

"It's off on the glacier," declared Dick.

"No, sir! It's on the ridge!" said Ned, equally positive.

"Pshaw! That's only the echo. I tell you it's off on the glacier. There, now, what do you say to that?"

"I say it's on the ridge! Look for yourself and see!" exclaimed Ned, pointing up to a place nearly opposite the other hut fully a quarter of a mile away.

Dick saw the strange object instantly.

It was the little old man again.

There he stood on the ridge with his trunk strapped to his back, beckoning to the boys in a most animated fashion to come up where he was.

"By gracious, I don't know what to make of this!" gasped Dick. "Is that thing alive or not?"

"What nonsense to think anything else," said

Ned. "Come on, Dick. Let's go up there and see who he is and what he wants."

"By gracious, I'll go if you do," said Dick, "but I'll be hanged if I care about it all the same."

"What's the matter? Superstitious?"

"Not at all, but just the same I don't like it."

"It's strange, I own, but I'm determined to find out what it means. I'm off now. You can come or not, just as you please."

"And leave Edith?"

"What harm can come to her?"

"I don't know as any can. All right; I'll go. He keeps it right up, don't he? He seems determined to get us over there if he can."

Stopping only to get their rifles, the boys now started to ascend the ridge.

Ned waved his hand to the little old man to show that they meant to come, and he immediately stopped beckoning, standing there motionless in the moonlight watching them as they hurried over toward the ridge.

In a moment they lost sight of him on account of the turn they had to take in order to get up the rocks.

But when they got on top of the ridge, there he was still, and beckoning again, which was hardly necessary, for they were making the best time they could.

"We're coming!" shouted Ned. "Stay there, will you? I want to talk to you! Don't go away!"

Then a very singular thing happened.

Ned had no sooner spoken, when the strange figure vanished before their eyes.

How it went or where, the boys were entirely at a loss to determine.

The little old man was there on the ridge one moment, and gone the next.

Dick declared that his hair was all on end, and even Ned felt a cold chill run down his spine.

"By gracious, this is strange enough!" he exclaimed. "I can imagine a dozen ways in which he could take himself off out of our sight, but why should he keep on doing the disappearance act—that's what gets away with me."

"That's evidently his style," said Dick. "But what are you going to do? Are you going on?"

"Decidedly, yes. Come, we'll make a move now. I've got the place fixed in my mind's eye all right. It's there by that big rock."

They pushed on to the rock and stopped again.

Nothing was to be seen of their strange visitor, but there on the rock lay a folded paper kept in place by a little stone.

"Hello! A letter from the ghost," exclaimed Ned. "What does this mean?"

"You can probably tell better after you read it," said Dick. "Here, I'll strike a match, and you can see what he has to say."

"By gracious!" cried Ned, as he glanced at the paper, "this is from the Unknown!"

It was in the detective's handwriting sure enough, and read as follows:

"DEAR NED:—The rush is on at last. Take Edith and what gold you can, and light right out without a moment's delay. The hardest gang that ever left Dawson are liable to drop on you at any time, and some of your old enemies are among them. From what I've heard I know that they not only intend to rush our claim, but I believe they would not hesitate to rob us of what we have taken out, if nothing worse. Go, and go now! Take some of the old boards and cover up the mouth of the shaft and then skedaddle down the mountain. They've got me prisoner, but you needn't worry about that. I shall manage to get away.

Always yours,

"ZED."

This was startling enough certainly.

The boys stared at each other, hardly knowing what to say.

"That means business sure," exclaimed Dick. "Ned, it's tough, but I've been expecting it. It's the same old gang; those fellows have been down on us ever since we started the new Mining Exchange."

"We're going to act on the letter, that's all," cried Ned; "but I'd give something to know who that fellow really is."

The boys were on the dead run back to the hut by this time, and not a moment was lost in arousing Edith, who, as a matter of course, was not a little surprised to learn what had occurred.

"That settles the ghost theory," she exclaimed. "The little old man with the trunk is flesh and blood, and appears to be a very good friend of ours, but I must say I don't like the idea of running away and leaving the Unknown in the hands of the enemy."

"Who says we are running away from him by going down the mountain!" replied Dick. "How do we know that he didn't go down himself?"

"That's what," said Ned. "More than likely he did go down, and that's how he got into trouble, but anyhow you have a mind to look at it, Zed don't make mistakes, and we want to act on his letter at once."

Now this point scarcely admitted any further discussion.

They hurriedly carried the gold up the ladder, all but the big nugget, which of course was too heavy to be moved in any such hasty fashion as this.

Next Ned took the old boards which had formed the door of the hut and wedged them in over the top of the shaft.

Down upon this cover they shoveled dirt and banked it down hard, strewing loose gravel over the top to conceal their work.

Everything was now closed in, and no one but a very sharp-eyed person would ever guess the place had been disturbed. The spades were then thrown into the river and the job was done.

Meanwhile nothing alarming had occurred. The

moon shone down upon the glacier as peacefully as ever, and it was hard to realize that there was any real cause for being so disturbed.

"I hate to leave so," said Ned, as they loaded themselves down with the bags of gold and started. "For a fellow to go back on his trump card is a very serious matter."

"Better to make sure of what we've got, than to run the risk of losing it all," said Edith. "Besides, there is the Unknown."

They moved on toward the ridge, climbed to the top, and started down the mountain, without experiencing any such difficulty as the detective had in finding the entrance to the pass, for, of course, the many times they went up and down in carrying their goods up the mountain, had firmly fixed the appearance of the place in their minds.

But trouble was right ahead of them.

Too much time entirely had been spent in concealing the entrance to the shaft.

They had not covered half the distance down the mountain, when the sound of voices below reached their ears.

"They are coming! By gracious, they are coming!" breathed Ned. "We are too late!"

"Let's have a look! Don't be scared before we are hurt," replied Edith.

She put the two bags of gold upon the ground, and leaning over the rocks looked down.

A great crowd of roughly-dressed men were wending their way up the mountain by the secret trail.

The rush to Rocky river had begun.

CHAPTER IX.

PRISONERS ON THE GLACIER.

"THUNDER! What are we to do?" exclaimed Young Klondike, when Edith announced her startling discovery.

"The best we can every time," replied Dick. "There's nothing to hinder us from going back, I suppose?"

"Would that do any good?"

"We might hide the gold."

"What do I care for the gold? I'd drop it all to save the Unknown if his life is in danger."

That, of course, went without saying, but the question was whether the Unknown was really with the rushers or not.

The dawn was close at hand, and Ned could see the faces of many a Dawson City tough, whom he knew only too well, as he looked over the rocks, but he could not see the Unknown.

"We'd better retreat," he said. "Of course we can't drive them down, and I don't know that it would pay us to do it, for sooner or later the rush has got to come; but we'll take our stand in the pass and

then we'll have a full view of them. They have got to give up the Unknown."

Now by the pass Ned meant the place where this narrow defile ended at the ridge.

They hastily retreated there and took up their station behind some loose rocks which completely concealed them from the path.

They had not long to wait before they heard the rushers trooping up the mountain.

"You surely don't mean to fire on that crowd, Ned?" said Edith; "it would be death to try to fight them here."

"Of course I don't," replied Ned. "Let them go on. As I said before we can't stop them; all I'm stopping here now for is to see if the Unknown is with them; if he isn't we'll just go on down."

In a moment the rushers were filing past the rocks led by Cool Codmore and Jerry Pilcher and never dreaming that Young Klondike's eye was right upon them as they passed.

There were as many as a hundred of these men and they were, as the Unknown's hasty note had said, the very scum of Dawson City, men who hated Golden & Luckey for their part in the work of breaking up the swindling old Mining Exchange.

But the Unknown was not among them.

The boys and Edith watched until the last of the gang had gone up upon the ridge, and then seizing the bags of gold stole down the path.

"Probably there are more of them below," Ned said. "They've left the Unknown in their camp."

"More than likely he's got away," added Edith. "You know what he is, ropes can't hold him, and I don't believe those fellows have killed him. Tough as they are they would hardly dare to do that."

"Best thing we can do is to get down the mountain while there's time," said Edith.

They started down the trail, going as quietly as possible.

The situation seemed dangerous.

To be caught on the trail with the enemy above and below might mean the worst.

Nothing occurred, however, and they got down the mountain in safety, and a few moments later found them standing by their boats, which still remained undisturbed under the rocks.

"Strange they didn't bother the boats," remarked Dick. "They must have seen them too."

Of course the rushers did see the boats, and the fact that they had not interfered with them made Ned wonder in his own mind, whether the case was as bad as the Unknown thought for.

Rushers to new diggings are very common in every mining district.

It was not in the power of Young Klondike to prevent the rush to Rocky river, and if he had possessed such power, he would hardly have exercised it, for it is the rush which makes the new diggings valuable after all.

"If it wasn't for the Unknown I'd go straight to Dawson," said Young Klondike. "I'd let them rush

the place and make the most of it. There's no particular reason why they should choose the spot where the shaft is, and, anyhow, I can file a notice with the claim recorder that we've jumped there first thing to-morrow morning."

Just as Ned spoke, the same strange cry was heard again, and looking up, they perceived the little old man, with his trunk still strapped to his back, standing on the rock where they had seen him first.

"Hello! Hello!" he shouted.

Then he waved his hands as though motioning to Young Klondike's party to get out of the way.

"What in the world does he mean?" said Dick.

"I think he's going to throw something," replied Edith. "Look; he's got his other hand behind him—he wants us to look out and not get hit."

They stepped aside, and just as Ned predicted down came a big stone which landed at Edith's feet.

As soon as it was thrown the little old man disappeared.

"Hello! There's a letter here," exclaimed Ned, picking up the stone.

It was tied around the stone with a strong cord, and when opened proved to be from the Unknown.

"Don't worry any more about me," it read. "I've escaped. Big thing on hand. So big that I hardly dare to think of it. You'd better get to Dawson with whatever you've brought down from the trump card. Meet me to-morrow night at the same place where you went up the mountain first. If I ain't there the little old man will be.
Yours,

"ZED.

"P. S. The little old man is all right, and don't you forget it. You may think you struck the trump card down there under Rocky river, but you didn't. I hold the trump card. Let the rushers rush and be blamed. We'll play our trump card to-morrow night."

"Just like the Unknown," said Young Klondike. "He's never happy unless he has a mystery on hand."

They now proceeded to drag two of their boats down into the water, and the gold was loaded on.

Nothing occurred during the run to Dawson, which they reached about four in the morning.

During the light season, people are early astir at Dawson City, and there were quite a number on the levee, who greeted Young Klondike enthusiastically.

All wanted to know where he had been and how the luck had run.

Ned was cordial to everyone, as he always was, but he gave them no satisfaction at all.

The gold was unloaded and taken up to the hotel, and later in the day was deposited in the bank.

At the usual hour Golden & Luckey appeared on 'Change.

Everybody crowded around them and commenced to talk about the rush to Rocky river.

Dan Mosely, one of the most active members was the first to try to question Ned.

"Say, Young Klondike, it's true you fellows are working up on the mountain, isn't it?" he asked.

"That's what it is," replied Ned. "We've been working my trump card for the last two weeks."

"Meaning a new claim up on the mountain?"

"Exactly. The trump card is a claim I've jumped. It's located on Rocky river."

"And where the deuce is Rocky river? No one ever heard of it before."

"No, I suppose not. Fact is, I gave the place its name myself. I don't expect you to have heard of it, but all the world will hear of it soon."

"Rich?" asked Mosely, confidentially.

"Very," replied Ned, in his coolest fashion.

"Then I'm off for Rocky river to-morrow. There's always luck where Golden & Luckey locate, and I want to be in the swim."

Everybody crowded around to listen to this conversation, and Ned knew the rush was on for fair.

"We may as well go the whole figure," he whispered to Dick. "We may as well let them know just how to get there."

Mounting the platform at the end of the long room, Ned addressed the Exchange.

He told exactly what he had done at Rocky river, described the richness of the gold deposit, and without disclosing any of the details of his private business—something which he always avoided—laid the whole matter before the Exchange.

The result was just what might have been expected.

Before night fully a thousand men had crossed the Yukon on their way to the new diggings on Rocky river.

These for the most part were respectable miners; men who could be trusted to do the right thing at all times.

"They'll swamp the toughs completely," Ned remarked to Dick, as they left the Exchange. "Let them go there and make a camp of it. I don't care."

By which remark it will be seen that Young Klondike had given up the idea of jumping the whole of the Rocky river land and selling out claims.

This plan was abandoned almost at the start.

The fact was Golden & Luckey had claims enough and did not care about going into land speculations.

Before the recorder's office closed for the day they had complied with the law so far as the land where the concealed hut stood was concerned, and they determined to be satisfied with that.

After supper Ned, Dick and Edith took one boat and leisurely pulled down the Yukon.

The rush was still on.

At least a dozen boats loaded with hardy miners were going the same way as themselves.

"Wonder what the toughs think about now," chuckled Dick. "There must have been over a thousand men go up the mountain since you gave the snap away on the Exchange."

"I don't know and I don't care," replied Ned. "We're safe as far as our claim is concerned. We want to get in and stake it out, that's all."

"There's time enough to do that to-morrow, ain't there?" inquired Edith.

"Lots. No hurry at all. We've got our appointment to keep with the Unknown to-night."

When they reached the landing, they stowed away the boat in the usual place, and leaving the rushers to make their way up the mountain, which they freely pointed out to them, Young Klondike and his companions walked on to the appointed place.

It was not yet dark, and they hardly expected to see the little old man so soon.

Nor were they disappointed, for they remained there until after midnight, and still no one had appeared.

Long before this, Edith had rolled herself up in her blankets and gone to sleep, while Ned and Dick sat by the edge of the river, watching the noble stream as it rolled on in the moonlight, and occasionally looking up on the rocks overhead.

"Confound the Unknown!" said Dick, impatiently. "He ought to have set some time. Does he expect us to wait up here all night? I never got a wink of sleep last night and I'm as tired as a dog."

"Probably he can't help it," said Ned. "Anyhow we can't. We've got to watch all night if necessary."

"You don't suppose he's been captured again?"

"Heavens! Don't suggest it."

"I won't, for I don't believe it. Of course he is on his guard now, and Zed is too sharp to fall into the same snap twice."

"That's what's the matter. Wonder what he's driving at? He must have made some big discovery to have written the way he did."

While the boys were still discussing the situation they were suddenly startled by hearing the same old cry on the heights above them.

Both were on their feet in an instant.

Looking up they saw the little old man standing on the steep slope with his trunk strapped to his back in the usual way.

He was holding on to a tree and beckoning to them. The Unknown was nowhere to be seen.

"That's for us," said Ned. "We must start right along."

"Coming!" he shouted. "Hold on there, and let's have a talk. We won't do you any harm."

The little old man made no reply. He stopped beckoning, however, and just stood there holding on to the tree.

Ned woke up Edith and they immediately began their difficult climb.

The moment they started the little old man started too and made his way up the slope, always keeping well in advance, but there was no disappearing this time as there had been before. In fact there was no place for him to disappear to on the bare face of that terrible ledge.

Of course, being well in advance, he reached the top of the ledge first and then vanished, but when they got up there they saw him standing down on the glacier near the hut, beckoning as usual.

As soon as he knew that they saw him, he turned abruptly, entered the hut and disappeared again.

Young Klondike's party now prepared to descend upon the ice.

But before doing so they paused to look at the wonderful change which had taken place over near the trump card since the night before.

The whole side of the bluff was covered with tents, and so was the level land on both sides of Rocky river.

In many of the tents lights twinkled in spite of the lateness of the hour, and not a few men could be seen moving about the camp.

It would soon be daylight, and the prospectors were getting ready to begin their work.

In the summer season Klondikers turn night into day, just as in the long, dark winters they turn day into night.

"Well, the rush is on for fair, Dick," remarked Ned. "This is going to be a busy camp for the next few months, or I greatly miss my guess."

"I don't see how in the world they are ever going to run it in the winter," replied Ned, "but I don't doubt they'll try."

Then they went down upon the glacier and made their way to the hut.

They found it empty as they had fully expected, for their eyes had been on it all the way down the bluff.

"Look out and see if you can see anything of that fellow, Dick," said Ned. "I'm tired of packing all this stuff and I know Edith is. We may as well stow some of it away here."

So they began stowing away the provision bags and other things, and had hardly finished when Dick called out that he saw the Unknown.

"No!" cried Ned, running out of the hut. "Where?"

"Away down there on the glacier. Look!"

Dick pointed down the great ice field; about half a mile away, pretty close to the line of the bluff, a fire was blazing.

In front of the fire stood a man waving a plug hat.

His form stood out distinctly in the fire's light, and although they could not distinguish his features, they saw that it could be no one else but the Unknown.

"I suppose we'd better go right down there," said Edith.

"Certainly we must," replied Ned. "Get your gun, Dick. We'll start right along. I reckon our stuff is all safe here. It ain't likely the rushers will come over before morning anyhow, and by that time we shall know just where we are at."

As soon as they were fairly started the Unknown disappeared, but they still had the fire to guide them and they kept steadily on.

But the mystery continued to be a mystery.

When they reached the fire there was no one near it.

It had been built directly on the ice, about a hundred feet out from the shore.

Ice surrounded them on all sides. For the Unknown to hide was impossible.

"He must have gone over to the bluff," said Ned, "and all we can do is to wait for him, unless—Heavens! What was that?"

A thunderous report suddenly broke upon the stillness.

"It's the ice breaking up!" Dick exclaimed.

"Never! This glacier must have been here a thousand years!" answered Ned, and he had no more than spoken, when the report was heard again, louder than at first.

Instantly it was followed by an awful crash, and our Klondikers witnessed a sight which few persons have been favored with or ever will be.

All around them—in every direction the ice sank down, breaking up into great masses which ground together, falling lower and lower, crushing, crashing, grinding, turning, twisting, until they had sunk to a depth of fifty feet or more, leaving Young Klondike and his friends standing on a pillar of ice high in the air.

They were prisoners on the glacier. The pillar of ice had not been moved.

CHAPTER X.

"THIS IS THE TRUMP CARD."

It was some moments before Young Klondike or either of his companions could find words.

The change which had occurred on the glacier was so tremendous, that it seemed to strike them dumb.

It was Dick who broke silence first.

"What in thunder is it all about?" he blurted out.

"Some underground river has washed away the foundations of the glacier—that's all," said Ned.

Young Klondike was as cool as a cucumber, as indeed he always was at times of great emergency like this.

"I suppose that's it," said Edith; "but how about this ice we are standing on? Is that going to give way, too?"

"I shouldn't wonder."

"And we can't get off it. We are here, and here we are likely to stay, unless someone comes to the rescue."

They looked off toward Rocky river, fully expecting to see a rush along the bluff.

None came.

To be sure, the noise of the collapsing glacier had been heard, but none of the prospectors were sufficiently interested in it to come down and see what it meant.

They were all gold hunters, and when a man is hunting gold, as a rule he is not much interested in anything else.

"Next thing we know, this will be going down, too," said Dick, gloomily.

"Don't croak, Dick," replied Edith. "There ain't a bit of use in that."

"I'm sure I don't want to croak," said Dick, "but I can't help saying what I think."

"Let's try to be cool. Edith, you don't seem to be scared one bit," Ned remarked.

"What's the use of being scared. We can't make anything by that."

"That's right. There's no use in it. Still, there ain't one woman in a thousand who would take things as you do."

"Then it's lucky for you that you've got the other nine hundred and ninety-nine somewhere else instead of here."

Ned laughed. In spite of the seriousness of their situation he felt that some way of escape would be shown them if the pillar of ice only held.

"It seems as firm as a rock," said Dick, looking down dubiously upon the broken mass of ice below them.

"When it goes to pieces it will go down with a rush, but it don't follow that we shall be killed even then," replied Ned.

"If we can only get down there alive there is nothing to hinder us from walking right off the ice," remarked Edith.

"Where's the little old man? Why ain't he around now to tell us what to do?" said Dick.

"There's a man now," cried Ned, for just as Dick spoke a man suddenly appeared on the side of the bluff.

"It's the Unknown!" exclaimed Dick.

"Hello! Hello over there!" bawled the detective gesticulating violently. "Are you all right over there? Are you alive?"

"You bet we are!" cried Ned. "What are you going to do for us? Anything? We don't relish the idea of staying here!"

"You don't have to but a minute. Hold on, dear boy. I'll get you off."

As the Unknown thus spoke, another figure suddenly appeared beside him.

It was the little old man. He was without his trunk now and seemed to come right out of the face of the rock.

"Is that ice firm?" bellowed the Unknown, putting his hand against his mouth.

"Seems to be!" shouted Ned. "What are you going to do for us? Whatever you do you want to do it quick!"

"I've got a rope for you!" yelled the detective. "Just you wait!"

Then he turned and vanished again, and so did the little old man.

"A rope! What nonsense! What can he ever do

with a rope?" groaned Dick. "What good will it do us, anyhow? There's nothing at all in that!"

They waited with breathless impatience for the re-appearance of the Unknown.

It was fully ten minutes before he came.

Meanwhile, the gray of dawn had just begun to show itself in the east.

The Unknown came out from behind some rocks dragging a heavy rope as big round as a ship's cable after him.

"Hello! We'll fix you now!" he shouted. "If I get this rope to you can you make it fast anywhere over there?"

"We'll have to!" answered Ned, "but how the deuce are you going to get it over?"

"I can fix that. Do you think you can come over on it hand over hand?"

"I'd like to know what's the reason I can't," cried Ned. "Just give us the chance to try, but hang me if I see how it's to be done."

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, I do, then, and I'll mighty sudden show you," replied the Unknown, and he popped in out of sight again behind the rock.

"By gracious, he's a regular Jack-in-the-box," said Dick. "I'd like to ask him a question or two and see how he got there, if I could get a chance."

Out came the Unknown with a smaller line.

This he tied to the cable, and tying a rough stone to the other end flung it over toward the prisoners on the ice.

It just didn't reach, and the stone carried the rope down upon the ice hummocks below.

"Never mind. We'll try it again!" shouted the Unknown, good humoredly. "I'll pull in. There's no such word in my dictionary as fail."

"Where's the little old man?" called Ned.

"Gone!" yelled the Unknown, hauling away on the rope.

"Who is he?"

"Don't you know?"

"How should I?"

"See you later, Young Klondike. I've got all I can do to attend to this line now. That ice may go to pieces any moment. I want to get you off."

"You can just bet your life we want to get off ourselves then," said Ned, and he did not try to force the Unknown to talk after that.

Presently the rope came flying over again.

This time it fell within an inch of the edge of the ice pillar and next time Ned got the stone.

Then he hauled in and soon had the cable over on the ice pillar.

It kept paying out and paying out through the Unknown's hands. There seemed to be no end to it.

"How long is the thing anyway?" called Ned.

"Oh, there's a thousand feet of it," replied the Unknown. "Pull away. You can't come to the end of it if you try."

"How in the world did it come to be up here on the mountain?" Edith called out.

"All explanations postponed until later," replied

the Unknown. "Now, then, haul in, boys! Make fast around the ice; there's plenty of rope."

This Ned and Dick were able to do after a little.

They ran the rope entirely around the ice pillar, and tied it in a strong slip noose, which would pull tighter under the strain of their weight when it came to be thrown upon it.

"I can never get over there," said Edith, doubtfully.

"Oh, yes, you can; don't you worry. Put your hands on my shoulders, and I can carry you over easy enough."

"I'm sure I can never get over any other way," declared Edith again. "Do you suppose you could bear my weight as well as your own, Ned?"

"If Ned can't, then I can," said Dick. "We'll get you over somehow, Edith."

"You'd better hurry up!" shouted the Unknown. "Don't you take too big chances on that ice—it won't pay."

"Go ahead, Dick, I'll follow with Edith," said Ned.

Dick demurred at first, but finally yielded.

Hand over hand he went over the rope and landed safely at the Unknown's side.

His feet were scarcely on the ground when a sharp crack under their feet warned Young Klondike that the ice pillar was in danger.

"Quick, Edith! Now!" he exclaimed, and seizing the rope, he leaped out over the hummocks.

Edith put her hands on Ned's shoulders and clutching him desperately dropped over the edge of the ice.

Another crack!

Ned could feel the rope tremble as he worked hand over hand.

"Put your arms around my neck, Edith," he gasped. "The ice may be going, but we've still got the rope."

"Don't you fret about me. We can only die together," Edith replied. "I think the ice is going, Ned."

She passed her arms around his neck, and locking her hands together held on for dear life.

The Unknown and Dick watched them in despairing silence.

"Ned's progress was slow. Oh, so slow," Dick thought. "Would he never get across?"

"Don't speak! Don't say a word or you may do the business," gasped the Unknown, the perspiration standing out all over his forehead. "That's a terrible load for Ned to carry. If he can stand it he'll do more than I think he can, and—good Heavens! It's going! It's gone!"

There was another crack, and then another still, and the ice pillar crumbled before their eyes.

Before the Unknown's eyes, at least, for Dick shut his to hide the awful sight.

"Hold hard!" growled the detective, clutching at the rope and holding on for dear life.

The rope was fastened to something inside the cave

which opened among the rocks behind them, or the Unknown could never have stood the strain.

"Are they dead?" gasped Dick, seizing hold, too.

"Dead, no! Not a bit of it! Look down there?" the detective cried.

Dick bent over the edge of the bluff, and looked down upon the sunken glacier.

There was Ned holding on bravely, supporting his own weight and Edith's, too, just by the strength of his two hands.

"Don't you fellows let us drop!" he cried. "We're all right if you can only hold on!"

Of course they could hold on, and they could haul in, too.

Little by little they pulled them up, until Ned was able to get a footing on the bluff.

Dick seized his hand and pulled him forward, and the Unknown helped Edith.

Poor Ned fell down all in a heap.

"Edith is safe, thank God!" he gasped, and then the next he knew Dick was bathing his face with ice cold water from a stream which trickled down the bluff, and the Unknown was trying to force a swallow of whisky down his throat.

"What in the world is the matter? Did I faint?" he gasped.

"I guess you did," said the Unknown, "but you are all right now, dear boy."

"And Edith?"

"I'm here, Ned. There's nothing the matter with me. You've saved my life once more and I shall never, never forget it."

There was more talk—a lot of it. We need not go into it all here.

Ned was feeling pretty shaky and was glad to sit down at the entrance to the cave out of which the rope came, and he did this without feeling strength enough to ask the Unknown a question about himself.

Nor was this necessary.

The Unknown was in a talking frame of mind, and the explanation came without any urging from Ned.

"I suppose you're wondering all this time what I've been about, boys," he began. "Well, now, just let me tell you in as few words as possible, for of course, now that Ned and Edith are all O. K., you want to know. It's just like this: When I walked off last night I never stopped walking until I was down at the bottom of the mountain. You see I wanted to see if the rushers had made any move, and I found out blame sudden that they had, for they were there, and they moved on me.

"What's that you say, Dick? How did they capture me? Why, they lassoed me. One of 'em had a rope, and he just threw it round my neck and pulled until I was almost strangled. That's the way they got me, and the next I knew they were firing the questions at me to find out how to get up the mountain. Did I tell, 'em? No, sir, I didn't tell 'em! That's not my style. But I'll be hanged if one of 'em didn't find it out for himself while I was there;

but that was later on, after the little old man came to me from behind the rock and told me that you ought to be warned.

"What in the world are you talking about?" Cool Codmore hollered out. "Who are you talking to anyhow?" You see, boys, he couldn't see the little old man.

"I'm talking to myself," says I, as he came over to where I lay, 'but I'll talk to you if you say so, and what I'd rather do more than all is to write a letter. Mebbe I'll tell you how to get up the mountain if you'll let me do that.'

"Who are you going to write the letter to?" says he.

"Why," says I, 'to Young Klondike to be sure. I'll ask him if he has any objection to my showing you the way up the mountain. If he hasn't any I'm sure I haven't.'

"Well, boys, he asked me how I was going to get the letter up to Young Klondike, and I wouldn't give him any satisfaction, but kept saying I could do it. You'd better believe there were some words wasted then."

"I can easily believe it," laughed Edith. "I fancy I can hear you sparring with him, Zed."

"Oh, we kept it up in lively style and don't you forget it," laughed the detective, "but at last he gave it up and went away, leaving me to scribble the letter, for he untied my hands for the purpose. I'd have escaped then, but he kept watching me from a distance, and I knew the cuss well enough to feel pretty sure he'd shoot if I tried any funny business then."

"What did you do with the letter?" asked Edith.

"Why, as soon as I had finished it I just put it behind me on the rocks and waited. Didn't hear a sound, but when I looked around a few minutes later it was gone."

"The little old man got it all right," said Dick. "At least we received it all right from him."

"I know you did. I know all about that. It wasn't but a little while after that one of the gang found the way up the mountain. In the excitement that followed the discovery I managed to escape. I started to come up your road, and before I'd gone half way up, who should I run against but the little old man coming down."

"That was after he had delivered the letter," said Dick. "But where is he now?"

"Hold on a bit; you shall see him. Boys, the little old man may be peculiar, but he's all right. He showed me the way to a fortune, and all he asks in return is to be let alone."

"Mad?" inquired Dick.

"Well, a little."

"I thought so. Do you know him?"

Before the Unknown could answer, a noise like thunder was heard inside the cave.

"What in the world was that?" demanded Ned, roused to action at last.

"Come and see," replied the Unknown. "Here's

your trump card, Young Klondike! Come and have a look!"

He led the way into the cave. It was a small affair just like a dozen other caves in the Klondike country which the boys had seen, except that right in the middle was an opening exactly like a mining shaft down into which the rope ran.

"Natural or artificial?" asked Ned.

"Artificial!" said the Unknown. "Built by John the mummy. Another cave under this one. That's my trump card."

"A mine?" inquired Edith.

"You bet! The richest on the Klondike."

"Hello! Hello! Hello!" was shouted up out of the shaft.

"That's the little old man now," said the Unknown. "He's getting impatient to know how we made out. I ought to have let him know before."

He shook the rope and shouted down the shaft:

"It's all right! We are all here! We are coming down right now."

Immediately the rope was pulled down into the shaft.

"Used to be a sailor, that fellow," said the Unknown. "He was here twenty years ago, and before that thirty years ago with John, the mummy. In fact, he was John's partner, he tells me."

Of course, all were greatly interested, and Ned pressed the detective for further information.

"I won't tell you his name—I want to surprise you. All I'll say is this: He is a harmless lunatic, who for thirty years has known of what I believe to be one of the biggest gold deposits in the world; he never made any use of it, and he don't want to now. His carrying that little trunk on his back is one of his whims. He heard the yarn about the old man of the mountain, and it struck his fancy to personate him, and—hello, here's the ladder. Now, we'll go down."

There was no ladder to be seen, so the detective's exclamation was not altogether clear, but the rope had stopped and was being shaken; by this we mean the small rope, be it understood, the ship's cable—it was really three cables spliced together—had all disappeared down into the hole.

The Unknown began pulling on the small rope and up came a rope ladder made on the most approved pattern and evidently the work of an expert.

"He made it," said the Unknown. "That fellow can do anything. You'll see other ladders better than this before you get through."

"Are we to go down and interview this mysterious individual?" asked Edith.

"We are, most decidedly," replied the Unknown. "I'll go first to test the ladder. It's a long climb, more than two hundred feet."

The Unknown swung himself lightly into the shaft and disappeared down the ladder.

"Are you good for it, Edith?" asked Ned. "It's your turn next if you are."

"Well, I should be ashamed of myself if I wasn't after all we've been through," replied Edith. "If

this ladder reached to the center of the earth I'd go down."

So it was Edith next and then Ned and last Dick who went down the swinging ladder.

In a few moments all were assembled at the foot, where the Unknown stood holding a lantern.

The little old man was nowhere to be seen.

"Look, boss," said the Unknown to Ned. "You're the leader of this gang, and as your name is tacked on to everything, it may as well be tacked on to this, too. Look at it. Ain't it a dandy? Who says this mine ain't Young Klondike's best? This is the trump card."

CHAPTER XI.

COOL CODMORE SAYS IT'S WAR TO THE KNIFE.

THE walls around the bottom of the cave were not walls of rock as one might have expected to find in such a place, but walls of gravel.

The fact was, an immense deposit of gravel had been left here by the retreating glacier, for in former ages the ice field had been twice as large as it was at the present time.

Something caused this vast gravel bank to separate leaving the shaft and a long narrow tunnel extending in the direction of Rocky river running off from it, and in every direction the gravel fairly bristled with golden nuggets.

Millions upon millions were in sight.

Young Klondike, Dick and Edith with struck dumb with amazement.

Gold sufficient to buy the world lay all around them.

Supposing that they could ever succeed in taking out even a small fraction of it they would be in all probability the richest people in the world.

"Well, what do you think of that, dear boy?" cried the Unknown. "What do you think of that, eh? Ain't it great? Ain't it wonderful? Ye gods and little fishes, why, there's nothing like it in the known world."

"It's the biggest thing I ever saw," replied Ned, "but most difficult to handle."

"You bet we'll get there somehow. It can be done."

The words were hardly spoken when a curious sound was heard, followed instantly by a heavy thud in the distance, and the ground trembled beneath their feet.

"That's it! There goes another one!" cried the Unknown. "The blame thing keeps on dropping like that all the time. Come on and see the nuggets, boys. By the Jumping Jeremiah, the woods are full of them."

He hurried forward into the tunnel, swinging his lantern, and they presently came to a place where a

large quantity of the gravel had fallen and lay strewn across their path.

Regardless of the danger of another drop, Ned kneeled down and began pulling over the gravel.

"It's just chock full of nuggets," he declared. "Couldn't very well be richer. I never saw anything equal to it yet."

"But," said Dick, looking around fearfully, "this place is liable to cave in any time. It's just as dangerous as it can be. There goes another one! Say, we'd better light out."

The drop heard was far along in the tunnel. There was no mistaking its character. Another great mass of the gravel had come down.

"Of course it's dangerous," said the detective. "There is no denying it. Still, we've taken big chances. Confound that fellow! Where is he? I thought he would have shown up before this. Paddy's flea ain't in it with him. When you put your finger on him he ain't there."

"Who is he?" demanded Ned. "Tell us now and have it over with."

The Unknown laughed.

"Oh, that's only my love of mystery," he said. "Really, it's no great secret, Young Klondike. You have seen the man and talked with him."

"I have! When, where?"

"Have you forgotten Joe Dusenbury?"

"You don't mean to say——"

"Yes, I do! Joe Dusenbury it is and no one else, only when he masquerades as the little old man of the mountain he puts on a big false beard."

"He's mad, of course."

"He must be, for he makes no more of this gold than if it was so much sand. 'I don't want it. I've no use for it,' he keeps saying. 'It's nothing to me, but I'd like to see others get it. I'm too old a man to care for gold myself,' and so on to the end of the chapter. By the Jumping Jeremiah, he beats me, but I want you to understand one thing, he knows this mountain thoroughly; knows three different ways of getting into this hole, and maybe more, for all I know. I wish he'd stayed here, for I'd like to have you hear him talk."

"Have you been to the other end of this tunnel?" Ned asked.

"Yes, I have, and we'll all go there now. The rush is on, though, and Heaven knows how soon the rushers may discover it. Did you record the old Trump Card to-day, dear boy?"

"Yes; that's all attended to."

"Then we must get right down to Dawson and attend to recording this. What about the old shaft? I didn't have a chance to go over there since I left last night."

"That was covered up all right. I don't believe they'll find it."

"Lucky thing then, for—but never mind. I'll finish what I was going to say later. Come on and see what I've got to show you. By the Jumping Jeremiah, you'll be surprised."

The Unknown then started off swinging his lantern and chattering away about the peculiarities of Joe Dusenbury.

At every turn Ned expected to see that singular individual, but he did not appear.

On they went. The tunnel seemed interminable.

For a while it would slope upward and Ned began to wonder if they were coming out on top of the ridge; again it would take a deep dip downward and go so far down that there seemed to be no chance of its ever coming up again.

Again it would narrow down to a mere trail, and they would have to climb over great heaps of gravel.

But there was not much gold to be seen after they left the shaft.

"Ain't we most through?" asked Edith. "I'm getting tired of this."

"Too bad, for you may have to go back by the way you came," replied the Unknown. "It's more than likely you will, unless—hello! Here we are now!"

Suddenly the tunnel took an abrupt turn and came to an end, cut off by a wall of black rock.

"There you are," said the Unknown. "You can't go this way any further. Now, then, let's hear what you'd do, Young Klondike, if you were bossing this job."

"Secret here, I suppose?" said Dick.

"That's what there is. Mebbe you can find it, or Edith. You all have your chance."

"Let me see; let me see," mused Ned. "We are expected to strike something peculiar—and—hello! Who spoke?"

"It's war to the knife if I strike up against Young Klondike!" a voice distinctly said.

Then a mumbling of several voices was heard, and the sounds died away; the last which reached Ned's ears was a shuffling of feet. The sounds seemed to come from overhead.

The Unknown laughed.

"Well, what do you think of that?" he exclaimed. "Have you any idea where we are?"

"Can't say I know where we are, but it seems to me I know that voice," replied Ned.

"Cool Codmore?"

"The very person. We must be near Rocky river, then."

"Close to it."

"And close to the surface."

"Not at all. There's an air-shaft here; that's why we heard the voices so plainly. Look!"

The Unknown pointed to a break in the rocks, which he declared ran up to the ground above.

"That's where they get their air from," he said.

"Who?" asked Dick.

"Look here!" replied the detective.

He ran his hand over the rocks, and Ned saw it stop against a board built in between two rocks, which he had not observed until now.

The Unknown pulled aside the board and flashed the lantern in through the opening.

"It's the underground hut!" cried Ned. "Well, well, this is a surprise!"

They all passed in through the opening.

It seemed strange to find themselves back in their old quarters again. No one had ever thought of the board being movable, or dreamed of the existence of the cave during the days they spent in the hut.

But being at home again, so to speak, they immediately set out to make themselves comfortable.

Edith declared that they should have breakfast at once.

It was a cold spread, though, for they did not dare to start a fire in the little stove, for fear of the smoke attracting the attention of those overhead.

While they ate, they discussed the situation.

The main thing was to keep the Trump Card a secret from the rushers until the law could be complied with and the land above the tunnel secured to them for its whole length.

"We may as well turn in and get a little sleep," remarked the Unknown, at last. "If Dusenbury comes back he'll soon make his presence known, and as for Codmore and his gang we are safe enough from them for a few hours yet."

There were no two opinions on this subject, for all were pretty well tired out, so they tumbled into their old places and were soon off in the land of Nod, in which delightful country they remained until, all at once, Young Klondike found himself suddenly broad awake and sitting bolt upright in his bunk.

What had aroused him?

It seemed as if something had happened; Ned had an indistinct idea that he had heard something in his sleep.

It was dark in the hut, for the Unknown's lantern had gone out.

Had he been dreaming?

It seemed as though it must have been so, for all was silent now.

He listened and waited but nothing occurred, and he was just about dropping off again, when all at once there was a thunderous noise overhead.

Ned knew instantly what it meant.

Someone was cutting through the boards at the top of the shaft.

"Dick! Dick! Wake up!" he shouted. "Someone coming down!"

Dick was out of the bunk and on his feet in an instant and so was the Unknown.

"I hear! I'm awake! I'm coming down too!" called Edith from the loft.

The boys seized their rifles and prepared to defend themselves.

"They'll not drive us out of here if I know it!" cried Ned. "Here I am and here I propose to stay—what's the matter with you, Zed? What are you shaking your head at me for?"

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, a man has a right to shake his head if he wants to, and I'm doing it because I say let's don't stay here—let's go."

"Is a man to be driven off his own ground?"

"He who fights and runs away may live to fight another day, dear boy. Anything the matter with that maxim? I say again let's go."

"So do I," added Edith, coming down the ladder. "Let's go right out by the way we came in and join the rushers at their camp. We've got friends enough there to protect us against the toughs every time."

Crash! Bang!

Right then the boards were heard falling and men's voices calling to each other overhead.

"I give in—we'll go," said Ned.

The Unknown pushed aside the board and Edith slipped through the opening. The Unknown and Dick followed, but before Ned could get through Cool Codmore and three toughs came bursting in the hut.

"Hold on there, Young Klondike!" shouted Codmore. "It's war to the knife between us. We've got old scores to settle and you don't escape us so!"

Cool Codmore was fighting drunk and looked desperate as he whipped out a revolver and fired point blank at Ned.

CHAPTER XII.

HOW THE UNKNOWN'S TRUMP CARD FAILED TO WIN THE GAME.

IF Cool Codmore had been sober no doubt Young Klondike would have met his end then and there in the hut, but as it was the ball flew wide of its intended mark.

Ned did not attempt to return fire, but dodged through the opening and was able to put the board back into place.

He ran toward the light which was flashing ahead of him and joined his friends.

"Hurt?" demanded Dick, who ran to meet him.

"Not a bit of it. They saw me, though. It was Cool Codmore who fired. They are after us—here they come."

"Run! Run!" cried the Unknown. "We'll fight if we have to, but not while our legs will help us out."

And the Unknown flashed his lantern forward in such a manner that it gave no assistance to those behind.

"Hold on there! Stop or we'll blow you to blazes!" shouted Cool Codmore. "We know all about your big bonanza and we'll head you off yet."

Several shots came whizzing after them, but they ran straight on gaining steadily on their pursuers, who were unprovided with a lantern.

At last they could hear no more of them, and as Edith was pretty well winded they slackened speed.

"I guess we are safe enough now," said the Unknown. "That talk of heading us off is all poppycock. I don't believe they know anything about my trump card at all."

"They've got mine all right then," replied Ned,

"but, of course, they can't hold it. Just let us get out of this snap and we'll join the rushers ourselves."

They walked on and were making good time, when the Unknown suddenly declared that there was sand in his boots and that he could walk no further until it was out.

"You keep right on, I'll overtake you," he said. "Don't stop for me, please."

Never dreaming of what this might mean, Ned, Dick and Edith walked on.

They had not gone a hundred yards when a frightful crash was heard behind them.

"For Heaven's sake!" gasped Edith, clutching Young Klondike's arm.

It had come at last. A vast mass of gravel had fallen, the tunnel was choked up, retreat cut off, and the Unknown nowhere to be seen.

To describe the sense of horror which came upon Young Klondike and his friends, would be quite impossible. Words fail us. They stood there dumb.

"Oh, Ned! It's terrible, terrible!" wailed Edith, at last.

"It's tough on the Unknown. I'm afraid he's a goner!" gasped Ned.

He shouted to the detective; so did Dick, whose voice was louder than Ned's.

There was no answer then, but when they called a second time they thought they heard a cry.

Strangely enough, it did not seem to come from behind, but ahead.

What was to be done?

The tunnel was completely blockaded.

Again and again they shouted but there was no answer now.

"We'd better hurry out by the big shaft and get back to Rocky river for help," said Ned, hollowly.

"Just what we'll do," replied Dick, "but will it do any good? Poor Zed! I'm afraid it's all up with him."

They ran on, but worse was to happen. With the shaft almost in sight another crash came, this time in front of them.

It was awful in its intensity. The whole mountain seemed to tremble, and down came a vast mass of gravel, choking up the passage before them and enveloping them in a cloud of dust.

"We're lost!" cried Ned. "Heavens! The rest of it will be down in a minute. What are we going to do now?"

It was a momentous question.

Here they were prisoners in the tunnel and liable to be crushed to death at any moment.

"It looks very much as though we were here to stay," said Ned, at last. "Well, here's an end to all our fine schemes."

"Can nothing be done?" asked Edith.

"What can we do? Dig out? I guess not."

"At all events we must try," said Dick. "It won't pay us to stand idly here."

"Don't propose to," replied Ned, "but if there's

any digging to be done, we may as well do it on the other end and take our chances on finding poor Zed."

They started back for the other end of the shortened tunnel, overawed by the situation, and it is unnecessary to say thoroughly frightened, although neither one showed it by so much as a sign.

"It's my opinion the heaviest fall was on the other side," Ned remarked, quietly. "It wouldn't surprise me a bit if the whole shaft was choked up. I'm afraid the poor Unknown's trump card will never take a trick."

By this time they had reached the blockade, and were standing hopelessly surveying it, when all at once a light flashed on the gravel before them.

"What in the world!" cried Ned, wheeling around suddenly, to behold the little old man of the mountain standing in the tunnel facing them.

He held a lighted lantern in his hand, but did not have the trunk strapped to his back.

"Well, boys, it has come at last!" he said. "I looked for this years ago. Where's your friend?"

"Lost! Lost in the gravel there!" answered Ned. "How came you here! Can you help us to get out of this?"

"How I came here don't amount to anything," replied the man, "but as to getting you out I can do it. I'm sorry for your friend. He was a good man. Well, we must all die. Boys, do you remember me?"

"Dusenbury," said Dick.

"Yes, and that's really my name. I suppose I'm a crank. They say I am. I don't care for gold. I've known where millions upon millions lay now these many years, but I wouldn't put out my hand to take it. Too late now! The millions of my friend's old shaft will never be seen again."

"Has the shaft filled up?" asked Ned.

"Collapsed entirely. The whole ridge is settling. The sinking of the glacier was only the beginning. There may be another collapse in a minute which will close in on us. Come, if your friend has escaped it is by a miracle. If he is under the gravel there we can't help him. By the way, what was his name?"

"We can't tell you," replied Ned. "We never knew it."

"What? He your partner and you not know his name?"

"That's the truth, strange as it may seem."

"Then there are other cranks among these mountains besides me, it would appear. Well, boys, I'm harmless, I like to collect plants and live with Nature here in this Arctic wilderness, which was a wilderness yesterday, but is so no longer. I shall leave these mountains now that the rush has come to Rocky river, and push on further into the wilderness out of the way of man. Come, follow me."

Certainly, the man seemed anything but mad, or if his brain was in a measure touched he was, at least, harmless as he said.

He walked back by the way they had come with dignified tread. Ned wondered how he could have

mistaken him for a common miner when they met before.

He tried to question him further, but the man did not seem to want to talk.

Presently, when they had almost reached the blockade he turned aside and passed through a narrow break in the wall, a mere slit it seemed. In the deep shadows it was barely visible. Neither Ned nor his companions had observed it before.

"Is this the way out?" asked Edith.

Dusenbury made no answer. He seemed to have talked himself out.

Hurrying on up a narrow path, steadily ascending he suddenly passed out of sight; the boys and Edith following, they found themselves on the ridge at the very point where the little old man had so strangely disappeared.

"Where is he?" exclaimed Ned. "By gracious, he's gone again!"

It was a fact. Dusenbury had vanished in his usual mysterious way.

To be sure, there was plenty of chance for it here. He might have gone into the thick grove of fir trees a little further up the ridge, in which he might be hiding, or he might have gone on toward the shaft and lost himself among the big rocks, or even down upon the sunken glacier, for the way was not impassable here.

Ned called him, but got no answer.

"It is useless to waste time looking for him," he declared. "He went away because he wanted to go, and the chances are we wouldn't find him if we tried. Let's hurry on toward the camp."

By this time it was broad daylight, and the camp of the rushers lay in full view before them.

As far as they were concerned all danger seemed to have passed.

They could see the prospectors moving about the camp.

Dozens of tents had been put in place along the banks of Rocky river.

Great fires were burning all along the line; prospecting had evidently begun on an extended scale.

Many of these men were Young Klondike's friends, and he well knew that he had only to say the word to get all the help he wanted to attempt the rescue of the Unknown.

"We'll get right over to the camp," said Dick. "There ain't a moment to be lost if we still have any rope of rescuing poor Zed."

They hurried on along the ridge. Presently descending they came to a place where the camp was no longer visible. Here it was necessary to pass through a deep hollow where there were many big rocks piled up helter skelter. It looked as if some giant had thrown them there as a boy might throw down a handful of pebbles.

As they were passing among these rocks, Cool Codmore and Jerry Pilcher with a dozen or more drunken toughs behind them suddenly sprang into view.

"Hands up there, Young Klondike!" cried Codmore. "You can't escape us! By time we've got you now!"

He covered Ned with a cocked revolver, while Jerry Pilcher and another seized Dick, and two others got hold of Edith.

It was all done in a moment and resistance seemed impossible.

Before they realized where they were at they found themselves prisoners in the hands of the gang.

"Put down that revolver, Cool Codmore," said Ned, quietly. "You won't make anything by this move. What do you mean by this attack anyhow? Stand aside and let us pass."

"Not on your life!" sneered Codmore. "What do we mean? Why, we mean business; we mean the big bonanza, and we are going to come out top of the heap! Looker hyar, Young Klondike! We've had enough of your airs, and we mean to take you down several pegs. That mine down there by the underground hut is going to belong to us, and so is the big nuggets. But we ain't satisfied with that. We understand there's more yet, better yet, richer yet! One of our boys has had his eyes and ears open, and we know. Where's your big bonanza—the hole you call your trump card?"

"Do you suppose I'll ever tell you?" replied Ned. "Do you think for an instant that you can force me into anything like that?"

"Well, I can try," growled Codmore. "Look out now! It's coming! We are going to do you. One, two——"

Did he mean to fire at the word three?

If he did he missed his mark, for he never got that far.

Ned leaped upon him, wrenched the revolver away with one hand, and caught him by the throat with the other.

In a twinkling they were struggling desperately—struggling right at the edge of the cliffs which overhung the sunken glacier.

"Help! Take him off! He's strangling me!" roared Codmore.

"Don't interfere! I'll shoot!" shouted Ned. "Either this man has got to go down or I have! Beware!"

Now, Ned did not mean down the precipice. All he thought of was forcing Cool Codmore to the ground, but over the precipice they went, just the same. One false step on Young Klondike's part and down he went, pulling Codmore after him, who gave a despairing yell.

"Oh! Oh!" screamed Edith, struggling with her captors.

Dick in his desperation tore himself free and knocked down both men, joining in the rush to the edge of the cliff, a rush which was checked in short order, for at the same instant shouts and hurried footsteps were heard at the top of the rise on the other side of the hollow, and a crowd of men came rushing down.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, they've killed Young

Klondike!" shouted the voice of the Unknown. "Kill 'em! Capture 'em! Sweep 'em off the earth! Don't let a man escape!"

It was the Unknown alive and well, followed by fully fifty honest miners, but there was no need of any killing so far as avenging Young Klondike was concerned.

For at the same instant Ned bobbed up serenely over the cliff, dragging the limp form of Cool Codmore after him.

They had only fallen about five feet, landing on a rocky shelf, but Codmore struck his head and was stunned and thus proved easy game for Ned.

There was great rejoicing all around as soon as the toughs were secured, which took just about two minutes and a half.

"So you thought I was dead, did you?" exclaimed the Unknown. "Well, I thought the same of you, but it seems the cave-in left us both alive. I just returned to the hut and came with help to rescue you all—ye gods and little fishes! It seems that I was just in time."

If there was any more of our story to tell we should certainly tell it, but such is not the case.

Cool Codmore and his toughs were run out of camp,

and everybody else welcomed Young Klondike as the leader of the Rocky river rush.

The little old man of the mountain was never seen again.

Two weeks later Rocky river was as flourishing a camp as there was on the Yukon, or the Klondike, either, for that matter.

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